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THE HOUSE ON WHEELS;

OR,

Far from Home.

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FROM THE FRENCH OF MME. DE STOLZ.

Fanny, continuez les Bégues

BY

N. D'ANVERS.

WITH FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.



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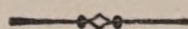
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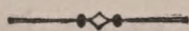
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THE HOUSE ON WHEELS;

OR,

FAR FROM HOME.



CHAPTER I.

SHOWING HOW HAPPY ADALBERT WAS.

It would be difficult to find a prettier place than the home of Adalbert's childhood, set down as it was in Normandy with its golden fields and far-stretching meadows, and its woods and lanes full of the sweet scents and pleasant sounds of the country.

All these delights, however, Adalbert shared with the children of the neighbourhood, for God has given the beauties of the open country to all the world; what he enjoyed with his brothers and sister only, was a large and beautiful house with windows opening on to a smooth lawn on which grew the loveliest roses imaginable, and on every side of which clustered tall trees, poplars, beeches, oaks, elms, &c., with shady paths winding in and

out, and a running brook, so clear that the fish could be seen disporting themselves in its waters.

At the bottom of the park there was a labyrinth of lilac and clematis bushes where you really might lose yourself, there were so many windings. This labyrinth seemed to have been made on purpose for hide-and-seek, and many a game did Adalbert have at it with his brothers Eugène and Frederick, and his sister Camilla.

Some fifty yards from the house was a pond on which floated a coquettish looking little boat painted in the most gorgeous colours. This boat was the chief attraction in the little world at Valneige, and a row in it by moonlight was the greatest treat it was possible to enjoy. Perhaps this was because that treat could only be had as a reward for very good marks at lessons, such as V. G. for *very good*, or E. for *excellent*. No pleasures are so delightful as those which result from faithful performance of duty.

Quite close to this pond was a fine farm belonging to Adalbert's parents, with a large cattle-shed containing some dozen cows and a bull, of which one could not help being a little afraid in spite of the soft expression of its great dark eyes.

A little further off was a stable, the resting-place of some seven or eight sturdy farm horses, and opposite to it a sheep-fold where four hundred sheep huddled together, leading the peaceful uneventful life in which they delight; whilst in courts, and stalls, on chimneys and sheds, in short here, there, and everywhere, swarmed feathered fowl of all sorts and sizes: cocks and hens,

chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons, &c., crowing and fluttering, quarrelling, bathing, or bringing up their families with an amusing air of superiority to the rest of the world.

Mother Barru, or in other words the farmer's wife, was queen of this peaceful realm. A kind-hearted woman with a pleasant face, who was never put out except on two occasions: when one of the farm labourers got tipsy, and when a hen laid her eggs where they could not be found. These two misdemeanours were considered criminal, the offenders were in disgrace for the rest of the season, and a repetition of their errors would lead to the dismissal of the labourer and bring the hen to the saucepan.

We can fancy how happy Adalbert's early years must have been, divided between easy tasks and pleasant games, watched over by loving parents. His first grief was the departure for school of his brothers Eugène and Frederick, both older than himself, whom he loved very much, although he quarrelled with them whenever he got the chance. The "big ones," as they were called at Valneige, knew that they ought not to take advantage of their strength, and as they would be sure to hurt the tender little Adalbert in any struggle, the dear children followed their good mother's advice and always yielded to him in the daily disputes about marbles, tops, and so on.

As for Camilla she was goodness itself, and although she was nearly fourteen years old, she would often play at draughts with her little brother, who sometimes con-

founded his own men with those of his adversary ; but then, you see, he was only eight years old. Camilla was as patient as her mother, and as grave as her father, and her parents had such great confidence in her that they let her teach Adalbert his first lessons, and the boy soon took to calling her "little mother." Sometimes Camilla in talking about verbs, or giving a dictation, would say "my child" with an air of such intense gravity that her father laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Everything was done by rule in the country ; a time for meals, a time for study, a time for play. Regularity is certainly a most excellent thing, so there were two clocks kept in the house, an ordinary striking clock and a living clock. The first hung at the end of the hall, the second ran up and down stairs some thirty or forty times a day : it went into all the rooms, it trotted about everywhere, talking and scolding—it knew everything. It saw all that went on. What a funny clock, you say. It was called "Rosette," which means a little rose, a rosebud, and must have been given to nurse—for Rosette, as you will have guessed, was the nurse—by some godparent who thought she would never grow up, as it was a strange name for her now that she was an old woman of seventy, with sunken cheeks, wrinkled forehead, and trembling hands. A little active woman was Rosette, rather strict, but very good at heart, and quite devoted to the family and to the house. She had been there so long that no one could think of Valneige without Rosette, or of Rosette without Valneige. The good old soul still wore the short petticoats, the cap fitting close round her face

and gathered in at the back, and the large white handkerchief with red flowers folded across her chest, which had been the fashion in her young days and which she called her "every-day" costume.

Rosette was as exact as possible even in the merest trifles. She could tell the time by the crowing of the cocks, the shadows cast by the trees, the cries of the birds, and even by an internal twitching sensation of her own to which she was subject at certain moments only, and which was invariably followed by a trembling in the legs ; of course, the consequence was that she was dreadfully strict about the keeping of every rule ever laid down. Had Rosette been the governor of the world there would have been as much fuss about everything going on so straight as there is now about things going askew.

You will now understand how Rosette came to be called the "living clock" of Valneige. She really was even stricter than the other clock, which was but a machine after all, and could only strike the hours according to rule, but Rosette could send lazy children dawdling on the stairs in lesson-time to their books with just a glance from her eye ; a sign would bring the most mutinous from the other end of the park, and on occasion her stern voice could recall each rebel to duty however great the temptation to neglect it. Instead of saying "the clock is going to strike," the children would say "Rosette is coming," and the regiment would file off, arms shouldered, without a word.

Monsieur and Madame de Valneige quite approved of this constant watching, which relieved them from so much

anxiety ; and the children themselves, although they were a little afraid of the old lady when she was angry, were very fond of her at heart ; because she was always just, because she made nice sweets, and because she really was more ready than any one to listen to their innocent little fancies as long as these fancies were not indulged in before such a time or after such a time. Regularity above everything.

CHAPTER II.

ADALBERT'S GREAT FAULT.

ADALBERT was a nice little fellow with bright eyes, a sweet smile, and, when he was good, that happy open expression of countenance which makes a stranger ready to love a child at once. He had a trim, well-set figure too, was as nimble as a gazelle, expert at running, and full of winning ways.

Every one was fond of him and glad to please him, but for all that, when people knew him well, they discovered that he had one very great fault. He was disobedient.

Instead of remembering that the people about him knew better than himself, he set himself up as a judge of what was right or wrong, and flattered himself that he might do what was forbidden without any evil consequences.

He was certainly wrong there : for disobedience is in itself a great evil quite independently of the harm which generally comes of it.

Have you ever seen a little boy afraid to meet his parent's eyes? who goes to some place just because he has been told not to go? who touches this or that, just because he has been told not to touch it? who does not seem able to amuse himself except at lesson time? who speaks merely for the sake of hearing his own prattle when he ought to be quiet? who is full of tricks for evading rules? If you know such a boy you will know what Adalbert was like. Poor Adalbert! I am going to tell you about his terrible adventures; yes, terrible, for I assure you my hair stands on end when I think of the dangers the child incurred in consequence of his habit of disobedience.

But there were plenty of pleasures at Valneige, I hear you say. Yes, plenty without going out of the way to find them by disobedience. The children could run about all round the house or in the paths and the little wood close by. They might have walked a good mile if they had chosen without exceeding their bounds. And they had a playground too, a regular gymnasium where they could stretch their limbs and gain strength and agility—a gymnasium with a rope ladder; a swing, a see-saw, and so on, in all of which Adalbert especially delighted.

But the best fun was when some little friends came to play with the children. We all know how pleasant games are when each one does his best to contribute to the general amusement, what clever tricks are played and what capital new jokes are made.

They were very fond of these children's parties at Valneige, and on Thursday afternoons some three or four

young rogues who happened to live close by would troop in with nothing better to do than play. Fine frolics they had on these holidays, making noise enough to deafen the neighbours; and many were their wild pranks, innocent enough in themselves, but sometimes rather annoying to the general public. Thursday was the day devoted by Rosette to regretting her own country, her native village, her very cradle, for in her old age she had taken to be-moaning her ill luck in having become so devotedly attached to these "tiresome children, who," as she said, "provoked her so," although she would not have left them for the world.

Rosette, as is sometimes the case with us all, was torn asunder by conflicting feelings. On the one hand, she could not help devoting herself to some one, and on the other she felt bound to regret that devotion from morning till night. If one of her little darlings was in trouble, if he tumbled down, for instance, and grazed his nose a little, the old lady would weep over the wound as she did her best to heal it, and then would feel quite aggrieved with the nose for getting hurt because she, forsooth, had suffered with it.

"Ah!" she would often say, "what a pity I ever knew these children! It was well worth my while certainly to stay when my old master died, to live with his son and make mischief. I had enough to live on quietly, I might have taken my ease in a little house of my own, and have had a little garden, some chickens, and a cat. Instead of that, I must needs go and stay here, and why, I should like to know? But it's over now—I have relations in my old home who will be glad enough to have me. I have made

up my mind, and I've told Master. As soon as ever it thaws I shall be off!"

So she would talk in winter, and when the frost broke up some tease asked her:

"Well, Rosette, when do you start?"

She would answer as the case might be. "Frederick's tooth-ache is too bad; I must put cotton wool soaked in warm sweet oil in his ear every night, poor little fellow!" . . . or, "Well, when I see Miss Camilla really holding herself straight I shall pack up, but I am so afraid of her growing crooked;" . . . or, "When that young rogue Adalbert leaves off being disobedient I shall go, but until then I must watch him like a pot on the fire."

And so the poor old lady talked; and the snow melted, the young shoots budded, the leaves turned yellow, the trees became bare, and still she was there, bound to the spot by the strongest chains ever rivetted—those of true and long-tried affection.

Every Thursday, that is to say fifty-two times a year, Rosette discovered that she did not care a bit for Valneige, not a bit! How was that? Because on that day things did not go on with the usual regularity; and the children were allowed to play from twelve o'clock till dinner-time; now, a good romp is just the thing to lead to torn trousers or fractures of every variety, broken bones and so on. This is why the good creature kept saying to herself on Wednesday:

"What a pity to-morrow is Thursday!"

As for us, we think these games must have been capital fun, but then we had not to take care of the children.

Madame de Valneige provided the little people with battle-doors and shuttlecocks, balloons, tops, skittles, hoops, and I don't know what else. The games began at 12 o'clock, and every now and then the dear mother came to look on like a guardian angel who brings all manner of good things and wards off all evil. She would say gravely but kindly :

"Amuse yourselves as much as you like, dear children, do just what pleases you, but remember my one rule and be obedient."

And Eugène, a boy with bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and a frank smile, would reply with a merry laugh, "Don't be afraid, mother dear, we shall be so busy amusing ourselves, we shan't have time to think of being disobedient." Then taking the bit between his teeth if he were a horse, or cracking his whip if he were the driver, away dashed Eugène and was out of sight almost before his mother could smile her approval. About Frederick, who was always grave and quiet even at play, Madame de Valneige was never anxious ; but there was one pretty, fair-haired little fellow who never took any notice of his mother's gentle warning. His name was Adalbert, but he was nicknamed *the disobedient*.

When any remarks were made on his chief fault, he would assume an air of indifference, try to catch a fly, and take care to hear as little as possible, although he knew perfectly well all that was being said.

"Children, be obedient." That meant : don't go to play near the edge of the water, take care you never touch the boat. Don't go into the stable without Philip ; don't go close to the horses' heels, as they might kick you ; don't ride

on the horses unless Philip gives you leave and has time to take care of you. Don't lean over the edge of a well; don't go beyond the railings which divide the playground from the road; don't run too far from the others when you are out walking; don't go too near a windmill, &c.

Adalbert knew all these rules by heart, and whenever he heard his mother sum them all up in the simple words, "Children, be obedient," he felt disposed to stop his ears as if that would help him to escape their meaning, for he had the greatest longing to do just what he was told not, and we shall presently see what came of it.

CHAPTER III.

ADALBERT IS DISOBEDIENT.

HOWEVER delightful our daily life may be, it is always rather a relief to have a change even in our pleasures. Imagine, then, what transports of delight every one was in when M. de Valneige declared one fine morning at breakfast that he was going to carry out a plan which had long been under discussion, but the execution of which had been constantly deferred. This plan combined everything that was most attractive, it would be most charming when the time came, and it was nice to look forward to it. Indeed, for more than a year it had been discussed by the little people, now in whispers, now in loud eager voices: "When, when, shall we go on the grand journey? when shall we see Paris, Strasburg,

Vienna, Prague, the lakes, the mountains?" . . . and at the very thought of them the children would jump up from their chairs, even if they were at their writing, of course sometimes making a sad blot in consequence.

But now, *now* it was decided; they were really going to start for Germany, travelling slowly, so as not to tire themselves, and with no other aim than to improve themselves without any lessons, and to amuse themselves. Madame de Valneige, it is true, who was very anxious to take this journey, had private reasons of her own for it; she was uneasy about her husband's health, and the doctors thought change of air and scene would be the best cure for a certain nervous melancholy, sometimes accompanied by fever, from which M. de Valneige was suffering. His wife carefully concealed her own anxiety lest she should communicate it to him and make him worse; and the children never suspected that their father was not as well as anybody else as he did not stay in bed or dress differently from other people.

When the decision was announced, the children clapped their hands; and when their father added, "We shall start in a week," they flung their arms round his neck.

A week later, the family were on their way, taking with them the faithful Gervais, a confidential servant, and everybody was delighted except old Rosette, who shed many tears, when "her four children," as she called them, left her. As soon as they were out of sight, she looked upon them as lost . . . and if she could have foreseen . . . poor old soul . . . but no, we won't let out the secret.

They stayed ten days in Paris, and the children were greatly delighted with all they saw in their walks. The difference in their ages and acquirements of course greatly affected their way of looking at things. For instance, when they passed the Tuileries, Adalbert only just glanced at the historical monuments, and could scarcely take his eyes off the gold fishes swimming in the ornamental pieces of water, and the stately swans, whose ancestors had witnessed so many great events without ever learning anything about the history of France. He was also very much astonished at the length of the Champs-Élysées, at the crowd, the carriages, and so forth, but what struck him most of all, and that in a very disagreeable manner, was, that somebody always would hold his hand. This seemed to him positively unbearable, and in his opinion detracted considerably from the splendours of the capital. Was he, who had had so much liberty at Valneige, come to Paris to be treated like a little girl? A man like him, it *was* a shame; poor little fellow—if he had only guessed . . . but no, the time to tell has not come yet.

After seeing everything in Paris, in which children most delight, M. de Valneige made for the east of France, and after stopping at all the interesting places by the way, the party finally arrived at Strasburg, where they had the pleasure of seeing the beautiful Cathedral, with its round arched Romanesque choir and exquisitely finished Gothic nave and transepts.

The large astronomical clock, with its moving figures always set in motion at noon, astonished and delighted

the young travellers far more than the west front with its famous window, or the celebrated open work spire; and as for little Adalbert, he thought nothing of Vauban's scientific pentagon citadel, and had eyes but for one thing in Strasburg, and that was the cock in one of the side towers, which always sang when the wonderful clock struck twelve, and all the apostles appeared together.

Fancy a cock which could sing! It was really too ridiculous!

So the little man was delighted, not exactly with Strasburg, but with the cock which to him represented Strasburg. One disagreeable thing, there was, however, even about this grand and beautiful town, and that was—he had to hold somebody's hand.

From Strasburg they went to Vienna, stopping by the way as they had done in the journey from Paris. M. de Valneige decided to stay eight days at least in the capital of Austria, so that there was plenty of time to see everything, and to wander about the beautiful Prater, and other pleasure gardens. The children did not know how to admire the wild Prater enough, part of which is nothing more than an old forest in which graze stags and roe-deer, who combine the joys of domestic life with plenty of freedom. Every evening a horn is sounded the meaning of which the animals fully understand, and they come trooping up from all sides to share the fodder provided for them near the house. Eugene and Frederick thought that most charming, and we quite agree with them.

M. de Valneige took his boys over the Imperial Arsenal,

which contains manufactories of all kinds of weapons. They spent some three hours in examining them, and before they left the building had made up their minds to prepare themselves for admission to the military school of St. Cyr.

Madame de Valneige was anxious to visit the environs of Vienna, and as the whole party were eager to accompany her, they went by train along the line which skirts the right bank of the Danube. First, they saw the Imperial Palace of Schönbrunn, completed under Maria Theresa, in one of the rooms of which Napoleon signed the treaty of Schönbrunn in 1809; and where also, strange comment on the instability of human affairs, his son the Duke of Reichstadt died twenty-three years later. Adalbert, who was far too young to care much about historical contrasts, was more struck with the thirty-two marble statues amongst the palm-trees of the gardens, with the obelisk, the beautiful fountain from which the palace derives its name, and above all, with the lions, tigers, and other animals in the menagerie.

The Castle of Luxembourg was also visited, and here what Adalbert noticed most were the old golden carps which he saw in a pond on his way back to the station. He fed them with bread, as he had the little gold fishes at the Tuileries, which simple refreshment they were graciously pleased to accept.

The week at Vienna passed very quickly, and from there the party went to Prague, stopping at all the large stations by the way. Adalbert left Vienna without regret; he had had a great annoyance to put up with in

the capital of Austria . . . he had had to hold somebody's hand! You see what an independent little fellow he was, obedience was positive torture to him. Poor, poor Adalbert!

They were all very pleased when they entered Bohemia. As Camilla said, there was something very quaint and interesting, perhaps even a little appalling, in this name; and she had a kind of fancy that the country was peopled entirely by fortune-tellers.

English children would not have the same feeling about the word Bohemia, so we must explain that Bohemians is the French name for gipsies, and that a great many gipsies live in Bohemia; never mixing much with the Bohemians or Czechs, but leading a wild wandering life of their own.

But, to return to our travellers. They were now in Bohemia, and were greatly charmed with Prague, which presents a most picturesque appearance, built as it is in terraces on the slopes of the hills, on either side of the Moldau; its palaces, its lofty towers and turrets, rising above the private houses and bridges. Besides, it was quite different from anything the children had seen in France, and made them feel that they were really a long way from home.

What chiefly tickled Adalbert's fancy, however, was not being able to understand what the people he passed said to each other, as some talked Bohemian and some German.

"I am happy now," said the little man, half in fun and half in earnest; "I am happy now, because I am really in foreign parts."

“All the more reason for keeping hold of somebody’s hand,” replied Camilla, who, with true feminine instinct, shared her mother’s constant anxiety about the disobedient little boy. It was not much use talking, though, as he never listened, and it required a positive order from his papa or mamma to make him submit to have his hand held; again and again, he would run off to look at this or that, until at last a state of feud was produced between him and the elders, a feud not always carried on with perfect politeness.

The bridge with sixteen arches across the Moldau attracted a good deal of attention from our travellers, and of course, as they were Roman Catholics, they did not neglect to pay a tribute of respect to the bronze statue of St. John of Nepomuk, the patron saint of Bohemia, who was drowned in the Moldau by order of the Emperor Wenceslas, because he would not betray the secrets which had been confided to him as a confessor.

The Hradschin, or palace district, as the quarter occupied by the nobility is called, was duly visited, as well as the Cathedral, which is a fine Gothic building, dating from the fourteenth century, and much resembling that of Cologne.

Adalbert’s mamma also took care to make her little son kneel before the relics of St. Adalbert in the little octagon chapel in the nave, and as he stared about him as children of his age will, the poor woman, her face hidden in her hands, prayed for him with mute earnestness as if she foresaw the misfortune in store for her.

The royal tomb of marble and alabaster, beneath which

so many of the great ones of the earth have found their last resting-place, was also duly admired.

A cannon-ball hanging by a chain from a pillar, which had fallen into this church during the Seven Years' War, attracted the attention of Eugène and Frederick, and even that of their sturdy little brother. Camilla burst out with a declaration she had often made before: that she hated war, it was a detestable thing, and her mother gave her a look full of sympathy.

The first day the party merely made a cursory inspection of the city of Prague, so as to get a good general idea of it; they meant to rest there a week, and then to set out on their return journey. The season was rapidly advancing, the days were drawing in, and it was getting cold; it was time to get back to their own country and their own fireside, that best possession of rich and poor.

Towards the evening, M. de Valneige and his boys, the ladies being overcome with fatigue, made an excursion to the suburb of Karolinenthal on the north-east of the city. It was just at the time when the labourers were leaving their work, and M. de Valneige called the attention of the elder boys to the troops of artisans making their way through the straight well-built streets, whilst Adalbert was intently observing all the little incidents which catch the eyes of children: a horse falling down, a dog being whipped, and so on. When his mother and sister stayed at home he had a little more freedom, his father did not always remember to keep hold of his hand although it had been made a rule to

do so at the beginning of the journey, and as for his brothers, they agreed in a whisper that this wise regulation must be a great nuisance, and were, in short, altogether lax in their interpretation of the law.

On this particular evening Adalbert was more tempted to disobey than ever, and he yielded to the temptation, staying behind on purpose when his father was occupied in showing his brothers a huge barrack capable of holding a whole regiment of soldiers.

A man was offering birds for sale just where Adalbert stopped, a far more amusing sight than a barrack.

“Oh, how pretty they are! Look at that red one; and that green one; oh, what a beautiful tail!”

Unfortunately, two lovely little birds had just challenged each other to single combat, and our future soldier, without having inquired into the merits of the dispute, took the most eager interest in the duel. One wore a tuft, the other wore none, that was all the difference; they seemed very well matched, and as no foreign power was likely to interfere, the affair might last a considerable time and cost one of the combatants, perhaps both, his life. This was the very thing to delight our little “officer;” he mentally espoused the cause of the tuft, and gravely criticised the strokes from the beaks which showered upon the field of battle. The tuft got a momentary advantage, but not having known how to remain on the defensive, it fell a victim to a simulated retreat, and finally got the worst of it, and fell on to the fine sand at the bottom of his cage. At this catastrophe Adalbert suddenly remembered he had remained behind

alone, and tore himself away from the place of temptation.

But the bird-seller was standing where several roads met, and which ought Adalbert to take? The child took that on the right, and not seeing his father or brothers he turned back and tried another with no better success. Then he thought he would ask somebody his way . . . but how could he do that, he had only arrived in the morning and had noticed nothing; he could not even remember the difficult name of the hotel at which he was staying. At last he spoke to some of the artisans who, more fortunate than himself, were returning to their houses. They did not understand. He now began to realise painfully that he was in a foreign country, one quite strange to him! His heart sank and he felt very much inclined to cry, but he did not cry; he walked on and on, until at last, when he was really quite worn out, he saw a tall man coming towards him, who looked at him very attentively, and at last addressed him in broken French. Adalbert answered him, the man listened attentively, and presently the little fellow, looking up in his new acquaintance's face with confiding eyes, let him take his little hand and lead him away fast, fast, faster.

* * * * *

All this time M. de Valneige was hurrying through the streets close by, a prey to the most terrible anxiety. He would soon have found Adalbert, had not the boy unfortunately taken quite an opposite direction. The unhappy father rushed backwards and forwards followed

by his sons, whose fright can easily be imagined. M. de Valneige knew but little German, only just enough for the ordinary necessities for travelling, and that he found quite inadequate for putting strangers on the track of a lost child. At last he tried to persuade himself that the boy had managed to find his way back to the hotel, and was sitting quietly between his mother and sister. They therefore turned towards the hotel, striding along side by side without exchanging a word.

But when they arrived M. de Valneige had not the courage to go upstairs. He did not know how to meet his wife. . . . She started up as he came into the room looking pale and exhausted, and understanding the question which trembled on his lips before it was spoken, she exclaimed in accents of despair: "He is lost!"

There are moments in life which defy description. None but a father or a mother could realise the misery caused by this loss of a child, removed not by death, but by accident. When a child dies those whom he leaves behind know where he has gone, the suffering is all on their side, he has nothing more to bear, his parents know he is well off, and their tears are not altogether bitter; but when he is lost, lost in this world, so full of evil and of evil-doers, it is indeed terrible!

Without allowing himself a moment's rest M. de Valneige, accompanied by Gervais, resumed his search in the town. He was in fact in that state of feverish excitement, when fatigue is absolutely unfelt; and the good Gervais, scarcely less moved, kept heaving the most profound sighs at the thought of the poor little

fellow he had known from a baby. M. de Valneige hastened to put the matter in the hands of the authorities, and his heart sank indeed as he described the appearance of his little son, and gave every detail likely to lead to his identification: he was fair, with a pink and white complexion, a dimple in his left cheek, a slight dint in his chin, bright brown eyes and a voice as soft as a little girl's, which contrasted strangely with his hardy, active frame. He looked more like a child of seven than the boy past eight he really was. He wore a suit of dark blue clothes and a plain linen collar, which he had stained with ink just before he went out, making a little blot scarcely noticeable in front on the left corner. Ever since he was baptized he had worn a gold medal round his neck, representing the Virgin with outstretched arms and drooping head. It was given to him by his mother with a prayer that her child might be kept from evil in the world, and if possible be allowed to survive her; and now, poor woman, he was lost, her little darling, her last-born child, was gone! Perhaps, perhaps, alas! he had been carried off by rough men who would make him share their wretched life, who would beat his poor little body! and teach him all manner of bad ways and wicked words! . . . At this last thought the poor mother felt her courage falter; she would rather have seen her boy perish before her eyes than think of him in the hands of men who would make his childhood one long martyrdom, and perhaps in the end lead him into crime.

Alas! M. de Valneige returned to his hotel in a state

of profound discouragement; no one had seen the child, no trace of him had been found. It was a most mysterious affair, and no one knew what to make of it. Every effort would be made to find out what direction he had taken, but there was nothing for the unhappy parents to do but to wait. To wait, to wait! when they did not know whether a child they loved better than themselves was still alive; whether he was suffering, calling for his parents! Truly such waiting was a daily death.

A week passed by; a fortnight, a month, two months, three: still no sign, no renewal of hope. And at last the unfortunate family were compelled to return to France, after making every possible arrangement for constant and rapid communication with Prague. Every one was however convinced that the little fellow had been carried off to some distance, and that he could only be found again by some providential accident.

The spring came round again and Valneige resumed its wonted beauty; the trees budded, the birds sang, all was again life and motion, but to three mourners these things had lost their charm. Poor old Rosette, more irritable and more lean and shrivelled than ever, fidgetted about, accusing herself and everybody else of negligence; M. de Valneige, his spirits completely broken, had become grave and taciturn, the melancholy to which he had been occasionally subject was now habitual; his business was neglected; his schemes for the future were abandoned; and grave fears were entertained respecting his health, which had long been failing. Whilst the poor mother went about doing all she had to do for her

husband, her children, the house, and the poor, with a heavy heart, striving to hide her suffering by a smile more touching in its gentle sadness than her tears. With a strength not her own, she controlled every rebellious thought, neglecting not the smallest duty. From her first waking moment to her last, her life was one earnest prayer, forming an under-current to every thought and every action. Her yearning after her poor boy was expressed in all she did or said; in her devotion to the poor and suffering, in her noble courage to endure; but it was in the silence of the night that this yearning became most intense, then her tears might flow unchecked; she need no longer crush down her sobs, and on her knees before the altar alone with God, her cry went up in the simple words: "Oh, my God! Adalbert!" and she knew that she was understood.

CHAPTER IV.

ADALBERT IS VERY FAR AWAY.

EVERYTHING is an event in a village; a commotion is created even if a hen tries to crow like a cock, and she is quickly killed lest evil should come of it. Imagine, then, the excitement at Valneige on the disappearance of little Adalbert.

Nothing was talked of but this sad adventure, and endless were the theories respecting it, in which of course the marvellous played a considerable part; for simple country folk are credulous and superstitious.

One day a woman came to Rosette to say to her :

“Look here, Rosette, your little one isn’t lost !”

At these words the old nurse pushed her spectacles on to her forehead, as she always did when she wanted to see more clearly. It was no good to suggest that she should keep them in a drawer, she wouldn’t hear of such a thing. For fifteen years she had worn spectacles, and she always fixed them firmly on her nose the first thing in the morning. In the course of the day she wore them for going in the garden or up and down stairs, but when she had to pay special attention to anything, to distinguish faces or colours, up went the spectacles directly. The good old creature really seemed to set nearly as much store by them as by her eyes.

Mother Godinette took a chair because the talk appeared likely to be long.

“Well, Rosette,” began Mother Godinette, when she had comfortably settled herself, “I am going to tell you something I’ve told no one else.”

This was how Godinette, who spoke very slowly, always began her sentences, and every one knew how much to trust to her discretion. Whenever the old woman kept anything to herself it was because she happened to be quite alone.

“Listen, Rosette, and I’ll tell you what happened to me, to me, I say. Last night I dreamt . . . but first I must tell you I had a pain in my legs, you can’t think what a dreadful pain ; first in the calves, you know ! oh, dear ; well . . . listen . . . there were dogs biting me, and I tossed about in bed like a pancake in a frying-pan, and

I rubbed myself and rubbed myself . . . you know there's nothing like rubbing when you've got a pain in your legs : it may be the cramp? What do you do, Rosette, when you have a pain in your legs?"

"Oh, I rub myself . . . but what were you going to tell me?"

"Well, as I was turning over, I said to myself, I wonder what time it is. It must be late; I wish I could drop off to sleep. I am sure it must be past twelve. I hadn't, in fact, an idea what the time was, but you know how one guesses when one lies awake. Presently I heard the parish clock strike. I counted on my fingers; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten . . ."

"Eleven, twelve," added Rosette suddenly, who was on thorns to know what was coming.

"Yes, ten, eleven, twelve. Well you are clever to guess that; who'd have thought it?"

"But what happened after that? you said that our little . . ."

"Not so fast, not so fast, Rosette; you needn't be in such a hurry . . ."

"A hurry!" cried poor Rosette; "when you go on like that . . . but never mind, let's hear the rest . . ."

"Well, when I found that it was only twelve, I said to myself, Really now, I thought it was much later. Night's the time for sleep, I must get to sleep. Bother my legs! and I did all I could to go off. I opened my eyes, I shut them, I opened them again, I coughed, I blew my nose, I rubbed myself, it wasn't a bit of good!"

"You said that . . ."

"I said it wasn't a bit of good . . ."

"Yes, but about our boy?"

"Patience, I say! At last I went to sleep again."

"Ah, what a comfort!"

"But I had hardly gone off before I woke up again."

"Oh, what a pity!"

"Well, I tried to go to sleep again. I turned over and over, I opened my eyes, I shut them, I coughed, I blew my nose, I rubbed myself . . ."

"And then?"

"Then I went to sleep again, and I dreamt that I was walking in a beautiful garden where there was a large pond, a great big one, bigger than I ever saw: but you know how one dreams, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, and then? . . ."

"Well, the pond was as long as from here to the end of the road; but what am I saying . . . as long as from here to . . . to . . ."

"To the end of the world, go on, do go on. . ."

"Yes, that's it, to the end of the world; she always knows what to say. Well, by the pond I saw a fox, and I said to myself, A fox, is it really a fox? and at that very instant I saw your little boy with a basket on his head . . . you know those baskets in which they put . . ."

"Oh yes, I know, I know."

"You know, you say . . . well, they put . . . what do they put in them?"

"Oh! anything they like."

"You're right there; as soon as it's a basket, they put anything they like in it. But after all, that's nothing to do with my story."

"Well then, let it pass, what next? . . ."

"Well, he caught sight of the fox, and he was frightened and let his basket drop, and it fell headforemost into the water. . . ."

"Poor little fellow!"

"What did you say? Poor little fellow—it was the basket."

"Well, never mind; you said headforemost, you know."

"Only for fun! Well, the fox came towards me, limping along, poor creature, as if he had hurt his paw; so I said to myself, Perhaps its paw has been broken by the hunters . . . and, talking of hunters, have you heard . . . ?"

"What?"

"They say two hunters were coming home through the woods the other evening, and they met a stray dog which fought with their dogs, and they were bitten."

"Poor beasts!"

"What are you thinking of, Rosette? Beasts! I was talking about men."

"Poor fellows, then!"

"And the dogs were bitten too."

"Well, poor dogs and poor men! But our boy?"

"Wait a bit. Then they saw in the darkness a great yellow ball like a little moon whirling about in the air, a metelor they call it, or a meteor, or something, the name doesn't make any difference in the thing."

"Perhaps that's as well, but what's the meteor got to do with our dear little boy!"

"What's it got to do with him? Why everything of course, it proves that he'll come back. A yellow ball

doesn't whirl about in the sky for nothing! But, now listen, I haven't done. As he was walking backwards the fox . . ."

"What, the fox again! You are going on with your dream then?"

"Of course I am; the fox—it's enough to make one laugh!"

"And the mad dog?"

"Oh, that was a real dog!"

"So much the worse!"

"Well, the fox . . ."

"Come, come, leave the fox alone now, and let us talk about my poor little fair-haired boy. Tell me what you know about him."

"About him! Oh, I don't know anything about him; how should I, when he was lost in Germany? But that's not much matter though, it is so far off; for when you see signs in the heavens, you may be quite sure the child isn't lost!"

This unsatisfactory conversation was still going on when M. de Valneige happened to pass by. Always gloomy and anxious, he was at once struck by the fussy, important air of Mother Godinette, and Rosette, noticing his look of inquiry, repeated what the old woman had just said; without, however, making any allusion to the wakefulness, the striking of the clock, the pains in the legs, or the fox; but her master replied sadly enough that there was no connection between the meteor and the poor lost child, adding that the fact to which they referred was nothing so extraordinary after all, but a well-known

atmospheric phenomenon, to which it was foolish and superstitious to attach undue importance.

Godinette, slightly piqued, but by no means convinced, made her courtesy, and went off to tell her dream, and talk about the yellow ball to some one else; and as for good old Rosette, finding the talk was at an end, she settled her spectacles back on her nose, and resumed her everlasting knitting.

CHAPTER V.

ADALBERT AT LAST FINDS OUT TO WHAT DISOBEDIENCE MAY LEAD.

WHILST the Valneige family were in the depths of despair, searching Prague and its environs for dear little Adalbert, where was he?

No one knew except the wretch who had carried him off, and torn him from his loving parents. Some evil, however, was certain, sooner or later, to befall a little boy who was so often disobedient. The very day he was lost he had disobeyed eight times, and as he did not happen to be found out he escaped punishment for the time, but, as we shall see, only for the time.

This was how things came about:

We lost sight of Adalbert just as a man of about fifty, wrapped in a coarse woollen cloak, was leading him away fast, fast, faster. . . . This man's face had a sinister expression, and there was nothing prepossessing about him; but then he spoke a little French, and the poor child,

in his great distress never dreaming of false play, followed him in silence. On they walked, so far that the poor little legs began to give way, and at last, worn out with fatigue, fright, and hunger, and discouraged by the gloomy silence of his guide, the child suddenly burst into tears.

“You are crying,” said the stranger, in a tone of assumed kindness, looking at him from beneath the broad-brimmed hat which shaded his dark face, and again assuring him that he knew where his parents were, and was taking him back to them, the man made him rest a little in a miserable, half-dark inn. The child was exhausted for want of food, and his guide gave him something to eat and drink, the effect of which was to produce a heavy stupor, which soon became a profound sleep. This was the very thing the man wanted, and taking the unconscious victim in his arms, he wrapped him carefully in his cloak, that he might look like a sick child, and carried him rapidly towards the railway station.

And after that? what happened after that? where was he taken? . . . He slept on, and when at last he woke he found himself in a mountainous country, and saw men like his guide passing backwards and forwards in the darkness. His questions were unanswered, and he was frightened out of his senses. At last, after many turnings, he saw a big carriage, a kind of house on wheels with windows and window-blinds. The dark man thumped at the door, saying a few words in the gipsy dialect. It was opened at once by an ill-favoured boy with an habitual sneer upon his face, and Adalbert was lifted into the “carriage” by an iron hand, to find himself in a narrow passage

with wretched little cupboards, called rooms, opening into it.

A very ugly, wrinkled old woman, with a skin which was almost black, said a few words to him in bad French, much as if she were speaking to a dog. He didn't quite understand her; he only felt an intense longing to go down the steps he had just climbed up to get into the "carriage," but the door was shut. The imprudent little fellow then looked at the old woman, and said in a commanding voice: "Open that door!"

"No, no, no!" cried the old hag; "once up here, you're up here for always!"

"For always!" repeated Adalbert indignantly, and the whole dreadful truth flashing upon him at once, he flung up his arms and screamed aloud.

A dirty wrinkled hand was clasped over his mouth, and terrible words fell upon his ears.

The child shuddered, and did not know what to think. All his ideas were turned upside down, and, half from terror, half from astonishment, he lost all consciousness.

As his eyes closed, the dirty hand which had enforced silence was removed from his lips, but only to seize a jug of bitter cold water and fling it into his face. The dear little boy opened his eyes again, looked round about as if for his mother, and then, the hot tears pouring down his cheeks, he said very humbly:

"Please ma'am, let me go back to mamma."

A shout of laughter greeted this, and with cruel irony the old Praxède, as she was called, shouted in his ear:

"Go to your mamma, then! run, run along!"

At this the prisoner saw that all was over, and knew that he was stolen.

This old woman, who looked like an evil fairy, was the mother-in-law of the man in the broad-brimmed hat, the grandmother, not of Gella, the master's daughter, but of her brother Karik, and so-called guardian of two poor children, a little boy called Natchès and a little girl called Tilly, who had fallen into the hands of the robbers much as Adalbert had done.

The new captive's grief was so intense that he left off complaining, and sank into a state of silent misery. He had, however, plenty of moral courage, and he mentally resolved, with the energy of despair, to escape sooner or later.

His body, it is true, was small and slight, but then he had great force of will, and felt that he could surmount many obstacles. Now, however, there was nothing to say and nothing to do.

"You are ill, go and lie down," said old Praxède, roughly pointing to a heap of rags and old clothes in a corner of the wretched room. Adalbert did not want telling twice this time, rightly feeling that there was nothing for it but to yield. As there were no bed-clothes, he did not undress, but stretched himself upon the rags, taking care to cover his feet with some old petticoats to keep them warm, and putting his little hand under his cheek that his face might not touch the dirty tatters.

As soon as he laid down he shut his eyes, and as he kept very still they thought he was asleep. He did not understand a word that passed, as the gipsies only spoke

their own dialect; but somehow he felt that Gella had a kind feeling for him, and was trying to soften the grandmother's anger. The young girl had rather masculine manners, and when she spoke loud her voice had the harsh sound peculiar to those who have to cry out in streets, but on the whole there was much that was taking about her, and so thought Adalbert as he peeped at her now and then from beneath his eye-lashes.

Gella was a tall girl of twenty, with a fine figure, as slender and supple as a young sapling, the beauty of which even her rags did not disguise. Thick raven locks fell over her face and neck, which were bronzed by exposure to the sun and wind; her mouth, though far from pretty, had a frank and pleasing expression, especially when she smiled, and her eyes, calm and gentle when at rest, could flash defiance on occasion.

Gella was the daughter of the gipsy's first wife, who had died almost immediately after the birth of her child. Her husband, contrary to the usual custom of his tribe, had married her although she was not of gipsy blood, but a native of Lyons. An orphan of sixteen in wretched circumstances, she had accepted his offer in her inexperience; and her elder sister, although she had disapproved of the union, took an interest in Gella, and now and then sent her some token of remembrance.

Altogether, then, Gella's appearance made a favourable impression upon the little prisoner; he felt he could trust her, although he was half afraid of her. Her black eyes and, heavy eyebrows, with her abrupt way of speaking, frightened him; but her round arms looked as if they



CELLA WAS A TALL GIRL OF TWENTY.

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would fold a child to her heart who flew to her for shelter : that is to say, if she had a heart.

Adalbert made sure she must have, because he wished it so very, very much, and he consoled himself with the thought : “ One of these days I’ll tell her I want to run away, and she will help me to escape ; and if she won’t help me, I must manage alone.”

But then he remembered his wanderings in Prague, and the troubles he had got into through not knowing his way or understanding the language of the country, and his spirits sank again. The first day was indeed horribly miserable, and in the evening, when he heard the old woman tell the children to go to bed, enforcing her order by a box on the ears—when Karik, a boy of fourteen, refused to obey—the poor child was reminded of his own great fault, and felt ashamed to see that he had shared it with one who had not been well brought up like himself. The two little ones came when they were called like lambs, and did everything Praxède told them to at once ; but Adalbert noticed that neither she nor Gella said to them as Rosette did to him :

“ Come, kneel down and say your prayers.”

“ No,” he said to himself, “ no one here prays to the good God. Perhaps they don’t know Him.”

When Natchès and Tilly had gone to bed, the former in the narrow cabin he shared with Karik, the other at the foot of Praxède’s bed, Adalbert remembered he had not said his own prayers. Poor little fellow, he did not dare get up and kneel down to say them ; but his heart was full of earnest devotion for the great Father who

watches over all His children, and instead of using the words to which he was accustomed, he could only murmur, in a voice so low that none but God could hear :

“Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me for being so disobedient !”

His case did indeed seem desperate : separated from his home and all he loved, and in momentary dread of the coarse gipsy man, of old Praxède, of Karik, who looked ready for any mischief, and of the old dog with its huge fangs.

But the night wore on, and at last, exhausted by misery and fatigue, his heavy eyelids closed, and he slept, to dream that Philip, the old coachman, was giving him a ride round the park because he had been a good boy ; that his mamma had kissed him twice, and that Rosette had mended the reins of his rocking-horse with some new stout string. Then the scene changed : he was sitting at table, the room was turning round, he was giddy ; but there was his father coming towards him. So you see that even in his dreams Adalbert was still hopeful.

CHAPTER VI.

ADALBERT WONDERS IF GELLA HAS A HEART.

THE day after Adalbert's loss was bright and breezy, one of those days which make you feel fresh and ready for anything. When Adalbert first woke, he was very fright-

ened, then, remembering all that had passed, he thought to himself: "Ah, well! never mind; I daresay it won't last long, I shall soon be out of this wretched 'carriage!'"

Fortunately he was not a spoilt child, he had not been petted and coddled up, and had acquired active, energetic habits. He could eat anything, stand cold without complaining, put up with annoyances, and even wait without making a fuss. Altogether he was a brave, sturdy little fellow, and when he was at home he never cried when he hurt himself if he could possibly help it, for if he did his papa would say to him: "What's the matter with my little girl?"

This one word was worth as much as a long lecture, for it reminded him that he was, as he said himself, a *man*.

Our little friend, then, with the strength of body and self-control which are the results of careful training, and with a kind of feeling shared by all very young children that it was impossible to be miserable for long at a time, did not make matters worse by grizzling over them, but determined to make the best of everything.

"As he would only be in the way as yet," as the old gipsy woman said, Adalbert was left alone for the present; but although he woke very early he kept quite still, pretending to be asleep, so that he might have time to make secret notes of all that was going on.

Praxède was so old and feeble that she seemed to breathe, but that was all, and she was afflicted by a nervous irritation which made her life a burden to herself and everybody else. Soured by the constant fatigue and misery of her wandering life, and by the increasing infirmities of old age,

she was the tyrant of the party. She hated everybody. She hated her son-in-law, whom she called the *iron man*; she hated Gella, who showed her no respect; and she hated her grandson Karik, who disobeyed her, and had already taken to swearing like his father. When she had been cried down by everybody, and found herself treated more like a servant than a mother, she would try and revenge herself on the dog, the hideous old Wolf.

But Wolf, accustomed to blows and hardships of every kind, was not to be intimidated. He replied to every threat from the old woman by a growl, and if she kicked him was very likely to bite her in return. So she had some respect for him, as she was just a little in awe of him.

But in this narrow little house there were two beings at least that she was not afraid of, for they were defenceless, and it was therefore on them she generally vented her ill-humour. Poor Tilly was so very pale and delicate that they did not dare beat her too much for fear she should be ill and have to be taken care of, so Praxède contented herself with speaking savagely to her, as one ought not to speak to a dog. She expected this poor little child of eight years old to be always on the watch, ready to obey the slightest gesture, and if she failed in attention or promptitude she got short commons at meals.

As for Natchès he was a regular black-sheep. He was a fine boy of ten years old, with a robust constitution, which enabled him to stand ill-treatment without injury to his health, but that did not prevent him from suffering. Praxède never let him forget that he was only tolerated for

the sake of the money he brought in. His disposition was naturally sweet, and long servitude had rendered him indifferent to blows; but his very silence under them served rather to irritate than to mollify his persecutor, and he was beaten for the slightest negligence, beaten for answering, and beaten for holding his tongue.

Adalbert from his bed of rags was witness of one of the unjust scoldings Natchès was always getting.

The day before he had been unfortunate enough to break a cracked pot, which had been used for the dog's food for years. He could not have done anything worse, for the old woman set the greatest store by her pots. When she saw it she screamed for Natchès in a shrill voice, and said to him :

"You broke my pot?"

"Yes," said the child, never even thinking of telling a lie, "I did, but I didn't mean to!"

"It was just the one thing wanted!" cried the old woman, crimson with rage; "but I'll pay you out for it, you good-for-nothing brat, you little viper!"

With that a shower of blows fell upon the miserable child. Praxède, old as she was, had plenty of muscular power left, and when she was in a rage she could hit hard enough. The boy however managed to elude a good many thumps by the adroitness with which he jumped out of the way, and seeing this the old gipsy seized a rope, to make more sure of reaching him.

Then Tilly, pale and delicate Tilly, rushed forward, and throwing her arms round her brother, as she chose to call him because of their common misery, she cried :

“Forgive him, forgive him ! oh, don’t hurt him !”

But the old woman, deaf to this touching entreaty, unconcernedly went on dealing out her vengeance . . . and Gella ? Gella was busy getting things ready for breakfast in a kind of miniature kitchen wedged into a corner of the steps outside the door.

What ! Gella, the young girl Gella, did she not run to the assistance of Natchès ? No, these scenes were so frequent that she was quite used to them, and never interfered unless in exceptional cases. Her heart had become hardened by living with people so lost to all sense of goodness, and although she had a naturally kind disposition, as proved by her smile, she very rarely showed any emotion.

Who was there to speak for Natchès ? The man with the iron hand sat smoking his pipe in silence ; Karik looked on with a sneer ; Gella took no notice, and poor little Tilly wept and pleaded in vain. Adalbert, Adalbert must take his part ; for all that he had learnt at home about justice and pity was ineffaceably engraved upon his heart. He started up boldly, and, throwing himself between Praxède and the child, he cried in a loud voice as the blows intended for Natchès rained upon his head :

“ You ought not to hurt him, and God will punish you !”

If it had not been Adalbert’s first day in the “ carriage ” he would probably have had cause to repent of his noble courage, but as it was his coarse companions were taken by surprise at his hardihood. The iron man puffed out a cloud of smoke, and burst into such a fit of laughter that his old grandmother was disarmed. Karik made some rough jokes, and Gella said a few kind words, for she was

glad to see Natchès get off so easily, although she did not attach any great importance to a beating.

One thing Adalbert had said had produced a profound effect, and that was : " God will punish you ! "

" Where is He, your good God ? " said the man with the broad-brimmed hat, addressing Adalbert for the first time.

" He is everywhere ! " replied the little French boy, who was beside himself with indignation.

" Oh, that's a good joke ! pray is He in my ' carriage ' ? "

" Yes, " said the child ; " and He sees everything. "

And then Adalbert, becoming ashamed of his boldness, cast down his eyes, and saw Tilly sitting on the ground looking compassionately at Natchès, whom she always loved better after every fresh beating.

The master, however, turned to our little friend and said, without any anger in his voice :

" Listen, my boy. This is all very well for once, but don't meddle again ; when the mother hits hard let her alone, it is no business of yours. "

These words led Adalbert to think that perhaps, in everyday life, this man was less to be feared than his mother ; but what surprised him most was Gella's indifference. He could not think how she could hear screams of pain without crying. He remembered his sister Camilla's tears over the fate of a pet dog which had to be shot because it was supposed to be mad. She had resigned herself to her father's will, it was true, but she could not eat any dinner the day it happened, and he remembered too how pale his mother had grown when she saw a little peasant hurt himself with a tool he had been using carelessly, and how she had said

as she bound up his wound, as tenderly as if he had been her own child : " It makes me feel quite ill."

" It must be natural to feel grieved when other people suffer," thought Adalbert. " Why then was not Gella miserable when Natchès was beaten ?" Perhaps constant contact with evil had deprived her of the power of sympathy ?

When the grandmother's rage had abated it occurred to her that it was time to teach the new comer his duties, and to give him a name and some clothes ; which meant to give him a nick-name to be known by in the " carriage " and to dress him in miserable rags. She evidently thought him a great bother, and kept telling her son-in-law that he had better have left him where he was, for he seemed to her just good for nothing.

" Don't make too sure of that," replied the iron man, nodding his huge head with its matted hair, looking like one of the statues of Hercules in repose. As he seldom spoke, he took no share in the perpetual quarrels which went on ; indeed it even seemed as if the inmates of the " carriage " were a little less bitter against each other when he was by.

The fact is, if not exactly respected, he was feared by all. He was called " master," or, more rarely, " father ;" his will was law, because from his authority there was no appeal, and, as is often the case, the certainty of being obeyed rendered him less exacting in trifles. He never spoke unless he was obliged, but when he did he was as immovable as a milestone ; nothing would make him budge an inch. The gloomy monarch of this wretched abode, he ruled by his mere presence, and if he were once

roused to put out his strength, everything must give way before him.

Even the old grandmother, rather than put him out, took care to do what he wished, and although she grumbled all the time, she made poor little Adalbert put on the clothes which were henceforth to be his. She looked through Karik's and Natchès' old clothes, and found some very short trousers and a very long coat, which she pronounced just the thing.

"Come!" she cried in a very sharp, harsh voice, "I suppose you must have a name. Well, what do you choose to be called?"

"I shall always be called Adalbert de Valneige," said Adalbert, drawing himself up.

"Hold your tongue!" screamed the old hag; "if you dare to say that name again I'll cut you in pieces. I'll pound you in a mortar, and give you to the dog to eat."

Adalbert was less affected by this horrible threat than by the way in which Praxède's small grey eyes glared at him. His head drooped, his arms fell helplessly, his whole attitude expressed hopeless despondency, and when she shouted in his ear, "You are to be called Moustapha!" he replied, in a humble voice, "Yes, ma'am."

"And you are to call me grandmother."

At these last words the boy's blood boiled. He had known his own grandmother, his mother's mother, who had been so good and gentle, and who, he had been told, had fallen asleep one night to wake in heaven; and was he to give her name to this wicked old creature?

"No!" he cried in a voice of horror.

“What did you say?”

“I said, No!”

A rough box on the ear greeted this second refusal, followed by another so violent that Adalbert lost his balance and rolled over to where Gella was standing, who whispered:

“You must never say ‘No’ here, little one.”

When she spoke low there was something very sweet and kind in the young girl’s voice, and Adalbert began to feel some hope about her again; especially when, lifting him up and putting her pretty brown hands on his head, she said:

“Come, come, grandmother, he won’t do it again!”

“So much the better for him!” replied Praxède, beginning to take off his own clothes, which, although very plain, were so good and nicely made that they would have betrayed him to be a little gentleman.

The poor little fellow looked sadly at his dark blue cloth jacket, and knickerbockers to match. He looked too at his collar, spotted with ink, and remembered how he had splashed it in a playful struggle with Eugène. He saw everything he possessed taken from him, and was obliged to put on one of Natchès’ coarse shirts, a horrid pair of trousers much too short for him, and a long, dirty, loose coat, which made him look like an old dwarf.

When this wretched toilette was finished Praxède got a pair of great scissors and passed them through the long, light curls in which Madame de Valneige had taken so much pride. Adalbert shuddered, but by a lucky whim the master made a sign that his hair—which curled naturally, and was a great ornament to him—should not

be cut. As, however, his pretty little face was too refined for the part he was to play, a dirty yellow ribbon was tied across his forehead, which completely destroyed the look of native nobility which had so long been a source of gratification to his mother.

Karik, whose naturally bad disposition had been rendered worse by education, now ran to fetch the looking-glass, with the aid of which his sister adorned herself when she was to dance in public to her father's music, whilst Karik thumped upon his big drum, and Natchès shook his Chinese bells.

Adalbert, seeing the looking-glass, knew only too well what the young mountebank's object was. Seeing that the prisoner hated having to put on the hideous costume, he thought to add keenness to his sufferings by letting him see how much it disfigured him.

Even Tilly, child as she was, resented the wanton insult, and as Karik passed with the glass she managed to breathe on it so as to make part of it at least dim. Adalbert was much touched at the tender tact this act displayed, and looked lovingly at Tilly, who dared neither stir nor utter a word. But Gella, striding up to her ill-natured brother, snatched the glass from him and put it back in its place.

Adalbert was quite cheered by this token of goodness of heart, which he felt atoned for the rough masculine manners of the young girl; and as he turned toward her with fresh hope in his face he again repeated to himself:

“Yes, she, she will save me!”

It grieved him, however, to see Praxède cut up the

clothes she had just taken off him with her big scissors, probably that there might be nothing in the "carriage" to excite suspicion.

Adalbert managed to save two small relics from the general ruin, one was an old, shabby button which Rosette had sewn on to the pocket of his knickerbockers for want of a better in the confusion of the departure from Valneige, and which, as is sometimes the case with what is meant to be provisional only, had stayed on where many a better one had come off; and the other, that corner of his collar with the inkspot, which was associated with the game the poor child was having with his brother when it got stained. In his childish misery Adalbert treasured up these two trifles as part of the happy days gone by.

Ah! how well he now appreciated all the comforts of Valneige! How he realised now the value of a good home with everything comfortable; of kind friends all round, not to speak of politeness, general good breeding, and so on. Here, alas! everything was coarse and vulgar.

Another very painful moment was when he had to eat the gipsies' soup for the first time. He was dying of hunger, for he had had no dinner the day before, and when the old woman brought him some potato soup in a cracked plate he felt horribly disgusted; but at the same time his craving for food was so great that he was glad to eat the soup, which really wasn't bad after all, and at least had the merit of being substantial, as an iron spoon stuck in the middle of it would stand upright.

All the time he was eating his breakfast Adalbert was thinking of Valneige, and seemed to see the dining-room

at home with four beautifully clean china plates on the table, and Rosette helping the children to soup. His dear mamma was passing the half-open door on her way to give her orders, and peeping in she said with a smile: "Good appetite to you!" and they all laughed, and Adalbert jumped down to run and kiss her; but Rosette, as particular as ever, cried out: "Sit still, you ill-mannered little boy! Do people jump down before they have finished? This is not the time for kissing, but for eating your soup!"

As this picture rose before his mind Adalbert felt his eyes fill with tears; but he was too brave to cry. No, he would keep up his courage; he would not give way; he would manage to save himself, sooner or later, and soon this became his one thought.

Tilly, seeing that he looked sadder than ever, thought he had not had enough to eat, so she very sweetly offered him her own plate, and said in a friendly voice:

"Would you like to finish my soup? It doesn't hurt me not to have enough to eat."

"Oh no!" cried Adalbert, pushing away the plate, and looking at her with a face full of gratitude. "It's very bad for you not to have enough to eat."

"Oh, never mind! I always feel ill."

"Where do you feel ill?"

"Oh, all over me!"

These first few words between the two poor children were exchanged in whispers, and Adalbert in the innocence of his heart said to himself:

"Poor little thing! What a pity I can't take her with me when I escape!"

After breakfast the work of the day began. What, then, was the work of the day in the "carriage"?

The work of the day consisted of various gymnastic exercises, calculated to make the limbs supple. The master stood Karik, Natchès, and Tilly in a row, and made them jump, wrestle, fence, turn somersaults, and so on. Then Hercules, as we will call the master, set Tilly on his shoulder, and carried her along as if in triumph, her pretty little feet clinging firmly to their support. She was obliged to hold herself perfectly straight, that her figure might retain its easy grace, and she had to practise kissing her hand and smiling sweetly. Tilly had long left off being afraid, the master was so strong and dexterous: the difficult thing was to smile and look happy all the time.

Natchès had become quite a marvel of agility and grace. He had been beaten so often ever since he was a baby that he anticipated his master's orders, and throwing himself heart and soul into his task, accomplished wonders. He was a handsome, healthy boy, but his spirit was broken. There was something servile in his expression, and his readiness to obey the slightest gesture was rather like that of a cowed hound which humbly responds to every call and is only too glad to escape beating.

As for the ugly and wicked Karik, he qualified himself for his rough calling by imitating his father's Herculean attitudes, gloomy looks, and coarse oaths; sometimes varying them by an attempt at wit; repeating his foolish jokes over and over again to himself, but failing to infuse any real cleverness into them.

His relations were convinced, however, that he would improve, and that they would be able to make something of him : as there was nothing taking in his outward appearance, he meant to make his way by sheer brute force. He aspired to be able, like his father, to hold a paving-stone with a rope round it between his teeth, and such like exploits. By way of recreation he would assume the most distorted attitudes, throwing himself backwards, and dexterously picking up a chair, or swallowing pebbles, eating fire, &c. Adalbert could really hardly bear to see him.

And through it all, his one thought as he watched the party at their tasks was, how should he set about making his escape? What could he do? Sometimes he thought of entreating Gella to help him, but he did not know her well enough. Suppose she were to laugh at him, and report what he had said to the master! It would only make his case worse than ever. No, he must give up that idea. And then he remembered how dangerous and impracticable flight would be in a country of which he did not understand the language. At last he decided to put off his project for the present, as his captors began to talk of leaving the mountains, and travelling slowly in the direction of the Rhine. The Rhine! there was hope for him in the very name, for he knew well that even before he got to the river itself he would meet plenty of people who could talk French. At this thought the poor child suddenly became submissive and patient, for he had resigned himself to wait, and to say not a word to any one, lest he should defeat his own objects.

CHAPTER VII.

ADALBERT LISTENS TO THE CLOCK STRIKING IN THE
DARKNESS.

WHEN the gipsies resumed their travels after spending a very long time in the mountains, Adalbert noticed with dismay that he was the object of perpetual anxiety and watching. The master, the old grandmother, the wicked Karik, and even the good Gella were spies upon him day and night. More terrible than any of them, however, was the snarling old dog, which looked at him with fiery eyes, and seemed ready to swallow him up at one mouthful if he made any effort to escape. The time had evidently not yet come; but then, when would it come? They stopped again and again, encamping just outside some town, generally without entering it, unless, indeed, there was some popular fête going on, and then, alas! the poor little French boy figured in the fête. The old gipsy woman meanwhile told fortunes by the way to whoever would listen to her, looking carefully at the palms of the hands of the superstitious people, to whom she told the most ridiculous lies, laughing heartily at their credulity when again alone amongst her own people. Even after he had seen all this going on for a year Adalbert had not become accustomed to it, but still retained a horror of such ignoble conduct, and an intense repugnance to the old hag.

Sometimes a secret dread came over him of never being able to put his project into execution, and then indeed his heart sank within him. They had, to be sure, passed through countries where he might have made himself understood, but where was the good of that, when he was never lost sight of for a moment?

However, they still talked of the Rhine, and there was some idea of stopping for a bit in the south of Alsace, after which they would perhaps go towards Lyons, where Gella would see her aunt again—the kind creature already alluded to who took an interest in the neglected gipsy girl for the sake of the poor young mother who had died so young and so miserably. These plans, which Adalbert accidentally overheard, were explained to him by Gella of her own accord, and did much to revive his courage; and, carefully keeping his own counsel, he determined to seize the very first favourable moment.

The Rhine once crossed the little fellow breathed more freely; he felt confident of his speedy deliverance, and was eager to know what would be the first stopping-place. He was delighted when they halted on the first evening opposite to a little town of which he did not know the name. There was always hope in a town and in a crowd. His one idea was to get away from his present companions; as for what would become of him after that, he never gave it a thought, feeling sure that no situation could be worse than the present.

When darkness had fallen it was decided to send into the town for a fresh stock of provisions. Gella, a basket on her arm, was generally chosen to go and buy the little

they needed, or rather the little they were able to procure ; for Hercules regaled himself at the inns they passed by the way, consuming a large share of the earnings of the party, and leaving but a scanty pittance for the rest. Beans, cabbages, coarse cakes, and potatoes were the ordinary fare, and a *pot au feu*, which even the poorest can generally afford, was quite a luxury to them.

As it was absolutely useless to make any complaint to their despotic lord and master, each one was obliged to be content with privately anathematizing the brute strength which governed without mercy.

On the evening in question Hercules announced that he had business in the town, and would follow Gella and the children, whilst Praxède, with her grandson and the hideous Wolf, should take care of the "carriage."

Adalbert finding he was to be of the party, felt his hopes revive considerably; he could see the winding streets of the town even in the distance, and surely he would be able to get away.

"The town is so big, and I am so little," he thought to himself, "they will never be able to see me ; besides, the streets are so badly lighted."

Habitually prudent, Hercules made a sign to Gella to hold the new-comer's hand. He saw well enough that the boy had too high and brave a spirit to yield to anything but force, and felt sure that he was always dreaming of running away.

So Gella took the little boy's hand. As for Natchès, he had been so thoroughly cowed, that his thralldom appeared to him quite a matter of course, and the idea of

breaking loose from it never even occurred to him. He was allowed to walk quite alone, and ran on before little Tilly, who was too weak and delicate ever to run. Poor little girl, her lassitude and her extreme youth made her to a great extent insensible to the misery and shame of her lot, but for all that, when she met a nicely dressed little maiden of her own age in the streets, she would suddenly feel very sad, without quite knowing why.

They set out and gained the town, without the master having uttered a single word. Here they parted, Hercules going to the right, and Gella to the left with the three children; but as he turned away her father, with a menacing gesture, said to her, in a tone which for her was that of absolute authority :

“Look after the little brat—you are responsible to me for him; take care what you are at!”

“Yes, father,” said Gella, looking down.

Gella, half wild as she was, and accustomed to dance at fairs and in the roads from her earliest childhood, never trembled before any one but the master; of him, however, she was afraid, and this fear made her obey him blindly, and never dispute his will. Aware of this, he ruled her by a look, and the result of the constant intimidation in which she lived was that she never neglected what seemed to her to be a duty. Naturally of a very good disposition, she would have grown up a fine woman, even if she had had no education whatever; and, without any very definite principles, or any consciousness of her own rectitude, she kept in the right path, warding off much of her father's anger and injustice by passive obedience to his will.

This was why Gella was never to be seen loitering about. She was always busy, either at her homework, her sewing, or at the exercises she practised to keep her limbs graceful and supple. If her heart were cold, it was no wonder, for she had never had anything to call out her affections; she had never seen anything but evil, and we may be sure that the good God had pity on her ignorance.

Adalbert, although he could not have said it in so many words, was vaguely conscious of all this, and when he felt his little hand firmly clasped in Gella's big brown palm, it was with confidence mingled with doubt rather than repugnance. But to resume. The little party come to a baker's, and they go in and buy two big loaves, which Natchès and Tilly take charge of; then they go to the butcher's, and Gella puts some very cheap meat in her basket, for cheapness is always the chief thing to be considered in her purchases. She does not know what luxury means.

The next thing is to go and buy some coals. They turn into the narrow winding streets, and seeing the confusion of men, women, and children in the half darkness, Adalbert asks himself if the moment has not arrived for making an attempt. Gella is no longer holding his hand: she is going into the coal shed, the children are following her. Our little friend looks furtively first to the right, then to the left: he hesitates, his heart beats very fast—it is all over now, he has made up his mind, he is going to make his escape . . . which way shall he go? Suppose he should meet Hercules?

The very thought makes him shudder? But what is he waiting for? Could there be a better opportunity? He is in a town, it is evening, there is a crowd, a noise. . . . He must be off at once.

Adalbert at last decided to turn to the right, keeping close to the walls of the houses, and feeling as if all the world were looking at him. Then, encouraged by this commencement of success, he hurried on and on, not knowing what he did, but possessed by the one thought that he was escaping from his silent tyrant, from old Praxède, wicked Karik, and above all from the snarling dog.

Walking so fast, with no object but getting away soon, made his legs ache, and at last he said to himself, in dismay, "Oh, where am I, where am I going?" Some anxiety about the future now became mingled with his feverish desire to leave the "carriage" far behind him; but imagine his horror, when he found that, in his headlong course, he had but made a circuit, and was back again in the very street he had crossed with Gella to go to the baker's! What should he do?

He looked about him with a face so full of anxiety that the most indifferent passers-by could not but notice him, and a woman with apples to sell stopped him, and said kindly:

"Have you lost your way, my little man?"

"No."

"No? well, it looks very much like it then. Where are you going?"

"Down there."

"But whereabouts down there? To the coal-merchant's?"

“Oh, no, no!”

“But you were at his door a few minutes ago! Come, tell me, have you lost your tongue?”

“Yes . . . no!”

“What’s your name?”

“Adalbert . . . Oh, no, no!”

“Oh, you don’t know what you are saying . . . Look here, neighbour Dubois, here’s a little chap in a coat much too big for him, with a shabby ribbon round his head. Perhaps he’s the child there’s been such a hunt for!”

“Perhaps he is, but he looks like a beggar, and whoever he may be it’s no concern of mine; I’ve no fancy for the rabble myself.”

“So much the worse for you! As for me, if I met a poor dog which had lost itself I’d help it to find its master. But, then, that’s my way!”

And with these words, partly out of goodness of heart, and partly because she was rather fond of creating a sensation, the applewoman took Adalbert’s hand to lead him to the coal-shed.

To her surprise he resisted with all his might, and the good woman, as she tried to drag him along, exclaimed:

“Come along, you stupid little fellow, I tell you your big sister is looking for you, and your father is running after you from the other direction! Don’t you see him? Ah, he is coming this way!”

And at this very moment Adalbert did indeed see Hercules striding along, his great black eyes flashing with rage, looking as if he wanted some object on which to vent

his fury. The poor little fellow was seized with indescribable terror; for one moment he hesitated, not knowing whether he should drop down paralysed before his persecutor, or make one more effort to recover his liberty. His native courage came to his aid, and tearing himself away from the apple-woman, he rushed down the opposite street, and ran as fast as ever his legs would carry him, until want of breath compelled him to stop.

The street he had chosen led into another, and that again into another; but in the distance he could see the plains, and he thought to himself: "If I can run till I reach the open country, I can hide myself in some sheltered corner."

As this idea occurred to him he made a great effort to run on in the direction of the plains But whom does he see running along a side street? Gella! her face pale and anxious, looking for him. The child felt his brain reel—what should he do? One moment he thought he would fling himself at her feet, and beg her to let him escape . . . but no, if her heart were really hard, he would be lost; and besides, she had good reason to be angry with him. No, he must run away from her.

His despair seemed to give him fresh strength, and he sped along like an arrow from a bow, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, with no thought but to disappear and hide himself from the avengers at his heels.

But Gella, too, is a good runner. She will catch him up, her feet seem to fly over the ground.

And now he has gained the country, he sees a solitary house. He will knock at the door; he will scream to the

inmates to let him in; they must have pity on his distress—they must hide him.

He reaches the house; he flings himself against the door, he knocks, he rings, he calls! No one answers, everybody seems to be dead inside, the shutters are closed. All is perfectly still. Adalbert hears Gella panting as she runs, he hears the sound of her feet as she rapidly gains upon him. She is close by . . . he runs round the house, he catches sight of a round hole in the ground with an iron bar across it—it must be the mouth of a cellar, a coal-hole, or something . . . whatever it is it must be better than the “carriage” . . . If Gella should catch him and take him back a recaptured fugitive, would not Hercules, or the old woman, or Karik, or all three, beat him to death . . . would not the dog bite him? The cellar would be better than that. It was at least an untried evil, and there is always hope where there is uncertainty.

He squeezed his head through the hole, then his shoulders and arms, and, seizing hold of the iron bar, he swung himself round it with the dexterity a desperate situation always gives, and, mad with terror, he let himself slide down the wall, falling with a crash of which he was quite unconscious on to a heap of he knew not what, from which rose a blinding cloud of dust. Where was he? The poor child had not the least idea, but he heard a dress rustle against the iron bar across the hole. Gella has stopped by it. She calls; she listens; presently she says:

“Are you there, little one?”

More dead than alive, Adalbert is silent, he dares not even breathe until Gella, worn out with fatigue, and still

panting after her run, gives up the search and goes away, perhaps losing all trace of the fugitive.

When all was silent again the very stillness became oppressive to the child, and now that Gella is no longer pursuing him, he wishes he could hear her footsteps. But not a sound reaches him, except that of a clock striking eight, which must have been wound up before the house was deserted. It had evidently been inhabited then, or at least visited not so very long ago. But when would anybody come back? And how was he to get out of the hole? He had never thought about that when Gella was close to him, but now the dreadful truth flashed upon him, and he felt horribly terrified.

A prey to this new dread, he again tried to console himself by thinking that Gella would be kind, that she would find her heart when she thought of a poor little abandoned child like himself. Had she not often given him a proof of her natural goodness? Yes, he ought to have trusted her, and there might still be time. He called, he shouted:

“Gella! Gella!”

But when he listened for her answer he only heard his own words repeated:

“Gella! Gella!”

On hearing a voice so like his own repeat what he had said, his flesh crept, the perspiration stood upon his forehead, his knees knocked together, his teeth chattered. Then he suddenly remembered the echo in the park at Valneige near the ice-house, and that his papa had laughed at him for being afraid of the echo which, he said, was only sound

returned by natural causes, and not as the little fellow had thought, the voice of some invisible creature mocking him.

Recovering from his fright, therefore, Adalbert resigned himself to wait, and settled himself in a half reclining posture.

“Only eight o’clock!” he said to himself. “It will be a long time before daylight comes! And when it does how am I to get out of this hole?”

He did not dare to move for fear of running up against something, and hurting himself. He was too much excited to go to sleep, but lay with eyes wide open, one thought chasing another through his brain, and more ideas presenting themselves to his mind than he generally had in the course of a whole day.

When the moon rose its beams did not penetrate to the bottom of the cellar, but only lit up one corner, and in that corner Adalbert saw something black about twice as long as his hand, which seemed to be clinging, so to speak, to the wall, swaying now to the right and now to the left.

“What can it be?” thought Adalbert.

He could not take his eyes off the mysterious object, and he could not imagine what it was. This became at last a new terror, for he was alone in the darkness, and he had not even paced his prison to find out its extent.

“When I get hungry,” he said to himself, “who will give me something to eat?”

Sometimes he thought he was too miserable ever to be hungry again.

Nine o’clock struck whilst he was still in a state of the

greatest despondency, and as he turned over on to his other side, in the hope of easing his uncomfortable posture, on his dusty bed, he caught a glimpse through the mouth of his cellar of a little bit of blue sky, in which shone a single star, set there as it seemed on purpose for him. He gazed at it with eyes full of gratitude ; it was a real comfort to the poor deserted child, buried alive as it were, and the sight of it suggested thoughts more holy than he had had when he was above ground. He said to himself with a touching simplicity :

“ The good God made that star His very own self, and as He knows all that is going to happen, He knew when He made it that a poor little boy would see it through a hole in the ground, when he had lost his papa, his mamma, and everybody belonging to him.”

As thoughts like these passed through his mind he burst into tears for the first time since his flight, and these tears did much to relieve his over-burdened heart. He felt that he was still under the eye of a merciful God, although he was eight feet beneath the ground ; and as the tears rolled down his cheeks, in spite of his efforts to control them, he murmured a few earnest, humble, confiding words of prayer ; and when they were over he still kept his eyes fixed on the star, and in spite of the increasing cold, in spite of the trouble of his heart, he might perhaps have fallen asleep opposite to the little strip of blue sky, had he not been obliged to turn his eyes every moment to the corner lit up by the moonbeams, to watch the black object which was always there, and the end of which moved now and then,

leaving the little prisoner in an agony of doubt as to what it could be.

The clock struck ten. The child felt as if he had already been a very long time in this subterranean place, and really without the star he would have been thoroughly out of heart; but there it still was, brilliant and beautiful, like a jewel flung down to him by the hand of the great Creator, and Adalbert whispered to it:

“Stay there, my beautiful star, oh! stay there, do not go away; you are my star, my own, and I shall give you a name. Learned men always give names to all the stars which shine up in the sky, and though I am not a learned man, I shall give you a name, the best name I know, for it is my mamma’s name. I shall call you *Adeline*, because you do me good. When I look at you I shall feel brave, and then when I get out of here, when I have found my parents, I shall look for you again, and you will see I shall look at you all my life.”

Even whilst he was talking to his new friend he felt constrained to turn towards the dreaded corner of the wall . . . and what does he see? The mysterious object has moved, is still moving, it is coming towards him. He has no longer any doubt, it is a big black rat, such an one as even the cats were afraid of at Valneige. One of the kind that Gervais set traps for, because, as he said, the brutes could bite.

Adalbert no longer saw his star or the beautiful blue sky; his cheerful hopes were gone too, and he could only think of the great black rat advancing treacherously upon

him in the darkness, and from which he could not escape, as he dared not move, not knowing by what he was surrounded. This was a new terror, and the tender regrets with which the poor child had been thinking of his home were changed for a vague instinctive horror of a dangerous creature in whose near neighbourhood he must spend the whole night, and it had only just struck eleven,

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME TOURTEBONNE INTERESTS HERSELF IN ADALBERT.

SOME people always like to see how things turn out of which they have witnessed the beginning. Of this class was the honest applewoman, who, as we have seen, had asked Adalbert so many questions. She remained motionless before her truck, looking after him as long as he was in sight.

Madame Tourtebonne—that was her name—stood in such constant need of sympathy that she unburdened herself of all her thoughts to everybody she happened to see, and as her sole occupation was to wheel her truck from one place to another, the whole town was in her confidence. It didn't matter to her whether people answered her or not, the one thing was to get a listener, so that it sometimes happened that the butcher came in for the conclusion of an account of which the grocer, who had been called away, had heard the beginning.

The good creature knew everybody, and was a general

favourite, because, like most people who are found meddling in other folks' concerns, she was always ready to oblige. She did not mind taking trouble for other people, and if any one had wanted her to talk for three hours at a stretch, she would gladly have talked four.

As she had been going her rounds in the town for some forty-two years, she knew the streets, roads, and houses pretty well by heart, and had become a kind of walking directory. Her business and her ready wit made her so well up in all that was going on, that she had been many times called for as witness in a court of law. These occasions were red-letter days in the good woman's calendar, for her memory was so accurate, her remarks were so circumstantial, and her language was so fluent, that she really often aided greatly in clearing up doubtful points. On this account people who had reason to shun justice shunned her, keeping out of her way as carefully as if she had been a policeman.

But to return to a more interesting subject. As soon as Madame Tourtebonne lost sight of Adalbert, she turned about to look for some one with whom to discuss the matter; but there was no one at hand but the portly Baptist, who was proverbially stupid and taciturn, and was now standing at his shop door. Well, never mind, he was better than no one; he was at that moment selling neither of the two commodities in which he dealt, herrings and cheese, and could therefore be made to listen to all the good woman had to tell whether he liked it or not.

"Did you ever see anything like it? A little fellow like that to slip through my fingers just as I was going

to show him his way! What do you say to that, neighbour Baptist?"

But Baptist never had any remark to make on any other subjects than herrings and cheese, so he merely said *hum* in a loud voice. It was an easy way of getting out of expressing an opinion on anything not directly connected with his business.

He took no interest, in fact, in anything but his trade and his pipe, which latter was for him a symbol of eternal rest. To go a step out of his way to see what was going on, to try and draw inferences from facts, seemed to him quite an unnecessary increase of trouble, and, being the man he was, he was not of course thought much of in his own town, and the gossips of the neighbourhood looked upon him as a mere cipher.

Madame Tourtebonne, however, was a host in herself, and could have squeezed an opinion out of a mule if it suited her purpose to do so. Not quite satisfied with the *hum*, which was the good man's only reply, she went on in a more urgent tone:

"You saw him, didn't you? The stupid little chap looking from right to left to whom I spoke? Come, answer me—you saw him, didn't you?"

Hum was again Baptist's only reply; but this time it was accompanied by an affirmative nod, intended to express yes, for M. Baptist was a Norman, and like a true descendant of the good Duke Rolf, or Rollo, he took good care never to say yes straight out. In selling, of course, he was obliged to say something more than *hum*, but even then he evaded direct assent by many a round-

about reply, or expressive ejaculation, such as : “ Well, I never! . . . That depends! . . . Why not? What do you think? . . . Come now!” and so on. Bargains being struck something in this wise :

Customer. Are your herrings fresh?

Shopkeeper. Look at them, and see if they are not.

Customer. Are they really the ones you brought in this morning?

Shopkeeper. What others should they be?

Customer. They are the freshest you have, then?

Shopkeeper. Do you think I would offer you any others?

Customer. Well, then, give me six.

Shopkeeper. There you have them, and fine ones they are too. Now for some cheese, I suppose?

Customer. I wasn't going to buy any.

Shopkeeper. But it's a capital thing for the digestion. People who don't eat cheese have indigestion.

Customer. Do they really?

Shopkeeper. I'm sure of it. Look at me, I always eat cheese; always have eaten it ever since I can remember, and I never have indigestion—if that isn't a proof . . .

Customer. Well, give me a little, only a little, mind.

Shopkeeper. Which will you have?

Customer. Not that one. It's very strong, isn't it?

Shopkeeper. It's first-rate.

Customer. That one's better, I think.

Shopkeeper. A capital cheese that.

Customer. Well, which shall I take?

Shopkeeper. Take both.

Customer. Oh no, I only want one, and that's too much.

Shopkeeper. Oh, cut it in half, and use one half first.

Customer. That one looks to me richer?

Shopkeeper. So it is.

Customer. And that other one?

Shopkeeper. That's very rich too.

Customer. Will it keep?

Shopkeeper. What a question!

Customer. You guarantee it?

Shopkeeper. If you don't find it good, bring it back to me.

So you see, Baptist, stupid as he was, had plenty to say about his cheese and herrings, and it generally ended in the customer taking both, which, truth to tell, were as good as he made them out.

And now it was his turn to have to give in, for Madame Tourtebonne was determined not to let him off easily, but ran on in quite an excited tone of voice :

“I declare there are no more children now-a-days. A little brat like that not to answer when one offers to do him a kindness! If his father had happened to come this way I'd have given him a bit of my mind. It doesn't do to turn your back on people when they ask you a civil question.”

Honest Baptist was just turning upon his heel to go into his shop as these words fell upon his ear, and thinking they were aimed at him, he decided to remain on his doorstep, constrained thereto moreover by his French politeness.

“Did you ever hear of such a thing?” repeated Madame Tourtebonne. “A child looking for his way ought to be only too glad if one leaves off what one's about to attend

to him. No such thing. Whilst I am pointing to the right, off he goes to the left . . . but, on the other hand, some children are so knocked about at home, it's no wonder they're in no hurry to get back to it. Children shouldn't be beaten, however tiresome they may be, and that poor little chap looked miserable enough, now I think of it. He was at the coal-shed a little time ago with his big sister and two other children, a boy and a girl. Did you see them, neighbour Baptist?"

Although the question was so direct the cheesemonger only said *hum*—this time, however, with three nods of affirmation, which meant *yes, yes, yes*.

"Ah, you did see them! Well, to own the truth, I think those people are a bad lot. The little girl was as thin as thin, mere skin and bone; the big boy was plump and sturdy enough, but looked as stupid as possible—too much beaten I expect; the big girl looked like a tambourine player, handsome certainly, but she gave me the idea of a strolling dancer with her short petticoats and rough hair; and as for the poor little fellow, perhaps he was a stolen child. Of course he must be! Why, he looked quite a little gentleman, in spite of his wretched clothes, and if he did belong to the people he was with he was very unlike the rest of them. He was fair and slight, with dainty little wrists and a soft white skin. . . he looked as if he had been brought up in some great . . . oh, look . . . look, neighbour Baptist, there is his father, we must call him here!"

"Holloa, sir, look here! Are you looking for your little boy with the yellow ribbon round his head?"

At these words Hercules turned aside, and took three steps towards the applewoman, whilst she went on :

“I saw him looking for his people, and I would have stopped him; but there, he was off like a hunted hound. You’ll very likely find him again though, and if he’s a young rogue who has broken bounds, I’ll tell you how to catch him again. I know these parts very well, every nook and corner of the town in fact, and twenty yards off there’s a police-office, and the inspector always has plenty of men ready to go off in all directions. Come with me, I’ll show you the way, and he’ll help you find your boy.”

All this time Hercules had listened with his usual air of indifference, but as the good woman finished speaking his dark eyes flashed angrily, and thinking he saw the lost child near the church, he darted off in pursuit without a word of acknowledgment of Madame Tourtebonne’s obliging offer.

Her astonishment may readily be imagined, and she stood opposite to her golden pippins staring after Hercules, whose behaviour was quite unintelligible to her, as she could see no one in the direction he had taken but three children of her acquaintance playing together by the light of the moon.

For want of any one better she was only too glad to turn to M. Baptist and say to him :

“You see that! The child was stolen, I’ll be bound. The man looks a regular brute; and did you notice his eyes when I spoke of the inspector of police?”

“Hum!”

“Ah! poor child. He’d look a regular little love with

his hair properly combed and in decent clothes. My heart aches for him, poor little darling. I'm sure there must be something not quite above ground in the matter, for when I asked him his name he said Adalbert, and then added in a great hurry as if he was frightened, No, no, no. Most children would answer readily and frankly, and never dream of concealing their names. What do you think about it neighbour Baptist? you who once had a little boy yourself, your poor little Augustus."

At the name of Augustus the cheesemonger started, and replied with unusual animation :

"I agree with you that he must be a stolen child."

M. Baptist generally lived in a state of apathetic indifference to everything except his business, but on one point he was sensitive, for in one corner of his heart he cherished the memory of his little son Augustus, who had died at about Adalbert's age. An appeal made in his name was never made in vain, and for the sake of the memory of his dead boy, Baptist, generally so calm, was always ready to rouse himself.

"Come, now," added Madame Tourtebonne, "what shall we do? For my part, I can't rest satisfied as things stand. I shouldn't be able to sleep for thinking of the child. Only fancy! some poor parents are perhaps at this moment looking for the poor little fellow, who has been taken away from them, and am I to stand with my hands before me doing nothing to help them find him? No, I couldn't do it. I have never had any children myself—more's the pity; but I'm very fond of children for all that, and if I had had any, what care I would have taken of them! I should never

have dared to let them out of my sight, for fear of losing them."

As she spoke Madame Tourtebonne, who had worked herself into a state of great excitement about Adalbert, burst into tears at the thought of the children she had never had. Then, taking out a large coloured pocket-handkerchief, she wiped her eyes, and smiled at her own weakness.

What she said of her love of children was, however, no idle boast, for all the little people of the town loved her rosy, good-natured face, partly for its own sake, but perhaps still more because she always gave away the fruit she couldn't sell rather than let it rot. "Here, child," she would say, "take this apple, it's a little gone here and there, and if I could afford it I'd give you a good one, but you can cut out the bad part, and you'll never miss it." And when the child said "Thank you," she would add:

"Don't mention it, I'm sure you're welcome enough, my little dear, it's a pleasure to see you eat it."

But to return to our tale. Her eyes dried, and her passing emotion conquered, the good woman turned once more to her much enduring companion, and resumed:

"It's getting late; it's very nearly bed-time. Hadn't we better make a declaration to the police before we go home? Come, say what you think neighbour Baptist? You loved your own little Augustus so much, fancy now if he had been taken from you!"

"Let's go to the inspector," replied the good-hearted cheesemonger, who, what with his companion's enthusiasm

and his own freshly awakened memories, was now thoroughly aroused. "Only let me just put up my shutters, and I'm at your service."

The shutters closed, M. Baptist wheeled Madame Tourtebonne's little truck into his own court for safety, and with a most chivalrous bow politely offered his old friend his arm, and together the strangely assorted couple made their way to the police-office, the applewoman's honest face beaming with satisfaction at the importance of her errand.

Once there Madame Tourtebonne poured forth a volley of words to very little purpose, whilst M. Baptist summed up the whole history in a single short sentence, and some few *hums*!

The inspector took down their declaration in writing, and expressed a hope that, sooner or later, these depositions would lead to the restoration of the poor child to his family.

M. Baptist and Madame Tourtebonne retired as they had come, arm in arm; the little truck was wheeled to the good woman's own door, which, as it happened, was quite on the outskirts of the town on the side of which Adalbert had gained the open country; and unable to sleep after such a day of excitement, the old lady lay awake forming scheme after scheme for pursuing the search, and determined to leave no stone unturned to solve the mystery.

All this time, as we know, our poor little friend was in a cellar sadly counting the hours in the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

ADALBERT IS HUNGRY.

WE left M. de Valneige's little son alone in the darkness, a prey to the most dreadful real and imaginary terrors. Now he thought the great rat was close to him, now that he felt it running over him. Presently however his attention was distracted from it by a noise which threw him into a fresh state of perplexity. This noise seemed to be a few yards off, and sounded like a carpenter at work, scraping, boring, hammering in rapid succession, as if he were in a great hurry; then abruptly leaving off as if to rest, the silence appearing more awful than ever between whiles, not even the breathing of the unseen carpenter being audible.

Once possessed of the idea that there was a man close to a door leading into his refuge, Adalbert's agitation became very great. First he thought the man would save him, and help him out of the cellar; then he saw himself at the mercy of a stranger, perhaps a wicked man, ready, like Hercules, to steal children.

Now and then the poor little fellow thought he would call out to him, and he opened his mouth to say:

"Good carpenter, come and help me! please come to me."

But the words would not come—his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth as in some dreadful nightmare. He

forgot the rat, he forgot everything in his new dread of the unseen workman.

The fact of his having often seen carpenters at work on his father's estate only increased Adalbert's perplexity now, for they did not leave off abruptly every now and then, and they finished what they had to do by daylight. It was altogether very puzzling.

Had Adalbert been a nervous child, frightened at trifles—which boys who mean to grow to be men never should be—he would have become ill with terror in this dreadful situation; but he remembered how his father had often told him that noises, however strange they may at first appear, are almost always the result of some simple natural cause, and this thought was some slight comfort to him now, for, giddy and wild as Adalbert had been, he had unconsciously taken many of his father's practical lessons to heart.

After the carpenter had been at work for some little time the noise ceased altogether, and Adalbert concluded that the man was tired or had finished what he was about, but he listened in vain for his retreating footsteps.

At last the child, worn out by the variety of emotions he had undergone, felt an irresistible drowsiness come over him, and soon after the clock struck twelve, in spite of all his terrors, he fell into a heavy, peaceful sleep.

When Adalbert awoke the first faint rays of dawn were striving to pierce the darkness of the cellar. At first he could distinguish nothing, and as the remembrance of all that had happened rushed in upon his mind he wished he could have slept for ever.

To escape from his sad reflections he tried to think of

something pleasant, and the image of his dear mother, never far from his thoughts, rose vividly before him. He saw her as she had looked the last time he had been with her, and he remembered distinctly every little detail of her appearance and dress, even to the wedding-ring, which had always been a great delight to him, for you must know that it was by no means an ordinary wedding-ring. It was larger than rings of that kind usually are, and so Madame de Valneige had chosen to have her children's initials engraved inside it in the order of their birth. When Adalbert was a little fellow, and had been very good, his mamma would allow him to open the ring and look at the letter A., which stood for his name. Even before he could say his alphabet without a mistake he always called out when the great ring opened :

“That's a C., and stands for Camilla ; that's an E., and stands for Eugène ; that's an F., and stands for Frederick ; and that is an A., and stands for Adalbert.”

When he came to the last letter he always thumped himself several times on the chest to make sure that he was he, then he clapped his hands, and his mamma kissed him.

Madame de Valneige found this ring very useful in managing her children, and one day when Adalbert had done something dreadfully naughty—when he had said *no* when he ought to have said *yes*—that is to say, when he had told a lie—she said to him, looking at him very severely, that if such a thing happened again she would send her ring to the jeweller and have the letter A. taken quite away. Adalbert never told a lie after that, you may be quite sure.

After thinking for some time of his mother, the poor child's terrors returned upon him. It was still too dark to make out what had become of the big black rat, and he was still puzzled about the workman. Had he fallen asleep close by, or was he gone? No, Adalbert had not heard any door opened, and felt sure that nothing had moved in the house to which the cellar belonged, except the pendulum of the clock.

He tried to forget the carpenter, but then arose the image of Hercules. Oh! how dreadful it would be to be caught by him again, to be seized by the great strong hands which could easily crush him to nothing! The very idea made the little fugitive shudder. And then there was the old woman, of whom he felt much the same shrinking terror as of the big black rat which he could now see moving about in the half light.

And Gella? ah, Gella! she might perhaps have been good to him after all. Why had he not answered her when she said so softly:

“Are you there, little one?”

He wished he had, although she would probably have wanted to take him back to the “carriage,” and what would have become of him then? Would not Hercules have beaten him like a dog? or perhaps even have killed him in his fury? This man with his huge bulk, his fierce black eyes, and gloomy silence, had inspired the little prisoner with an indescribable awe, and trying to put him out of his thoughts he began to puzzle his poor bewildered brains as to how he was to get out of the tomb into which he had fallen, if indeed he were ever to get out again.

and taking care to put plenty into his eyebrows and hair, rubbing it well into the very roots of the latter.

Ah, if dear old Rosette had seen him now she would not have known her fair little darling, and even his mother might have been doubtful at first.

Adalbert almost shuddered at the thought of his own appearance when he had finished his preparations; but after all, what did it matter when he was dressed in such miserable rags? It was a capital way of escaping detection, and the next question was, how to get out?

If he could have pushed the barrel under the mouth of the cellar, and put a few planks upon it, he might have climbed up by them; but he was rather nimble and dexterous than strong, and he could not get it to move; it really seemed to have taken root in the ground.

What should he do? The morning was being wasted in countless fruitless efforts, and he still saw no hope of success.

Another great cause of suffering to the poor child was the intense cold. It was now November, and the bitter wind which whistled through the hole above his head seemed to freeze the blood in his veins. His little feet were chilled with remaining still so long; but fortunately he had been brought up hardily at Valneige, and when he complained of cold he was told to warm himself by running about, and not to cry, for men did not cry for such trifles.

So he knew how to do a great many exercises to make him warm, and he felt that now was the time to practise what he had learnt.

Alone in the cellar, and far from all human succour—for the carpenter gave no further sign of life—Adalbert's little heart swelled with gratitude to the kind parents who had trained him in all manly ways, and he said to himself, "Ah, if I had been cosseted like a little girl, what would have become of me now?"

And so the brave little fellow did his exercises, and as soon as he got a little warmer, he again remembered the carpenter. "Was he there or was he not?" He could now see the door of the cellar, and he peered eagerly through the key-hole, but in vain. It was quite dark on the other side, and the child hastened back to his heap of dust, for there at least he got light and air. The mouth of the cellar seemed to him the only possible means of communication between him and the world.

The lonely child was now, however, able to make out the objects about him pretty clearly, and close to the bottom of the door he noticed a freshly made semi-circular groove, and on the ground near to it a little pile of yellow dust, which was evidently wood reduced to powder by some patient worker. Adalbert was a sensible boy, and he remembered having heard the cook at home, just before they left Valneige, complain of the damage done by the rats; indeed some holes they had made had had to be stopped up; and here and there the woodwork they had gnawed with their sharp teeth had had to be repaired, and Jane had said:

"Bother the brutes! One would think a carpenter had been at work here."

And Gervais, who slept on the second floor on the same side of the house, had added :

“ Really, last night, if I had not known it was a rat gnawing the wood, instead of letting himself be caught in the trap I set for him, like a sensible beast, I could have sworn that I heard a carpenter at work.”

All this led Adalbert to the conclusion that it was the dreaded black rat which had made all the noise, and that there had been no carpenter near him after all. This was a real comfort to the poor child's over-burdened mind, but he had not long enjoyed the sense of relief before a new and serious cause for anxiety arose.

What was that ? you ask.

The poor child was becoming faint for want of food : yawn followed yawn, not from sleepiness, but from the exhaustion consequent on his long fast. He had a strange sinking sensation, his head throbbed, and he would have been glad enough of some of the gipsies' coarse soup.

Every moment his sufferings from this cause became greater, and as he heard the clock above him strike at intervals, he felt that his hours were numbered, and each time the strokes sounded more like a knell. Dreadful thoughts rushed upon his mind : he had read a good deal for a child of his age, and knew many tales of travellers thrown upon a desert island, who did not know what would become of them ; but *they* were always sure to find two or three cocoa-nut trees, of which they could eat the fruit, or a wild bird, which they shot and cooked somehow, or at the worst a rock with shell-fish clinging to it ; whilst here in this cellar there was nothing but coal,

wood, and empty bottles. Adalbert must either get out of it or die of starvation.

As the day wore on the child got weaker and weaker, and in spite of himself his courage began to fail. He was afraid to move, as doing so seemed to make his craving for food greater. Cowering by the barrel, and leaning his aching head against it, he looked sadly up at the hole above him, still clinging to a hope that succour might come, for he did not forget that God could still see him and would not abandon him entirely; and every now and then he sent up a touching prayer, which seemed to be answered by the peaceful, happy thoughts which sometimes came to cheer him.

The prisoner now remembered having learnt the story of Joseph by heart, of Joseph whom God had rescued from the pit into which his cruel brothers had thrown him, and he said to himself:

“Joseph was almost as miserable as I am, and thought of Jacob as I do of papa—and his mother was dead. He had good reason to be dreadfully frightened, but he got out of the pit, and so shall I out of this cellar. Oh, God! Thou wilt send some one to help me as thou didst to Joseph! Have pity on me.”

And so hope revived in his heart; but a quarter of an hour later his despondency returned, for the remembrance of his home rushed over him, and at the thought of all he had lost he was completely overcome; bitter tears of repentance for his disobedience rolled down his cheeks, and he whispered softly, as if his parents could hear him:

“Forgive me, papa! forgive me, mamma! all of you at home, forgive me!”

Suddenly he remembered something which affected him deeply. It was the 3rd of November, his birthday; when the clock struck nine in the evening he would be nine years old, and there was always a little festivity in his honour on that day at home. It was the fashion at Valneige to make a great fuss about birthdays, for children were looked upon as blessings sent direct from Heaven. They were kissed and made much of by every one, they received presents from each member of the family, and Jane the cook prepared a grand spread with a great deal of mystery, to which Rosette added a few delicacies of her own making.

On such occasions M. de Valneige was always more merry than usual. He would play with his children, and shut his eyes to any slight infractions of the rules; and if anything really naughty was done he would look the other way, and pretend not to see it, rather than have to punish on a birthday.

As for the dear mother, Adeline, as papa called her, she was always so good and patient that no difference was noticeable in her, her mere presence was enough to make everybody happy and contented; and if she had been missing when the party assembled, there would have been a general outcry of:

“Where is mamma? it’s no fun without her!”

“What will they do at home to-day,” wondered Adalbert, with a heavy sigh. “No one will say aloud, ‘He is nine years old to-day’ . . . but every one will

remember it. There will be no games, papa will stay in his arm-chair reading the paper, and perhaps he will say at dinner: 'Adeline, you are eating nothing!' but he would have no need to ask why; he would know well enough that mamma was thinking of her poor little boy. Oh, how dreadful it all was!"

Presently Adalbert's attention was again distracted from his sad thoughts by one of those foolish terrors to which people of all ages are subject. A number of long thin black-beetles, with a great many legs, were running up and down the walls, and in and out of their little holes. Adalbert looked at them askance, hating to see them, and hating equally to kill them. Moreover, a huge spider occupied one corner of his refuge; but it was so busy spinning its web that he soon ceased to notice it, concentrating all his attention on the black-beetles, which were the real objects of his horror.

Miserable as he was in the cellar, Adalbert would gladly if he could have put back the hours, for he dreaded the night far more than the day. It had just struck four, and it was still light in the town and country, but down in the cellar it was rapidly getting dark, and with the daylight all poor Adalbert's hopes of succour must fade away, and he must resign himself to all the vague terrors of the darkness, this time aggravated by the pangs of hunger. The poor child felt that it was all over with him, and that this his ninth birthday would be his last. His strength was rapidly failing him, his head drooped, his limbs felt listless and heavy, as if his last sleep were drawing near. A few faint rays of light still illuminated

the wall opposite the mouth of the cellar, and Adalbert felt that when he had watched them disappear, he would never see the light of another dawn.

A sudden tender impulse of affection for those whom he had lost now suggested to him the idea of writing their names on this wall with a bit of coal. He struggled painfully to his feet, and with a hand trembling from weakness and grief he wrote, Papa, Mamma, Camilla, &c., the hot tears bursting forth afresh as each familiar name was added. Bitterly indeed he now repented of all he had ever done wrong, of all the faults for which he had been punished; but perhaps still more for those far more numerous errors which had escaped detection, and which God alone had seen.

And in the depths of his repentance the poor little fellow knelt down, his heart almost breaking, and wrote in large letters:

“I was stolen because I was disobedient. It was all my own fault!”

And now the daylight had entirely faded, and Adalbert crept back to his plank, and crouching down upon it, leant against the barrel. [The silence was so profound that he could hear his own laboured breath, and the very slightest movement of his worn-out limbs.

A little later the rain began to fall outside, the wind rose, and shook the aspen trees by which the solitary homestead was surrounded. Then the child, fainting with hunger and worn-out with pain and sorrow, thought that what he felt was death, so he bowed his poor little head and murmured softly, “Mamma!”

CHAPTER X.

ADALBERT HESITATES.

For a long time Adalbert did not stir, and he thought that all his powers were really exhausted. It had just struck eight. The sky was black, and so covered with storm-clouds that the little star which Adalbert had named Adeline the night before was not visible; even that consolation was taken from him, and he lay and waited without quite knowing for what he waited.

Suddenly he heard footsteps, then the brushing of a dress against the iron bar accross the mouth of the cellar, then a very sweet voice saying quite softly :

“Are you there, little one?”

His heart beat violently, and he started to his feet, surprised at the strength his excitement gave him, then he began to think he had been dreaming, for he heard nothing more.

In a state of the most indescribable anxiety he listened, and at last he again heard the same words :

“Are you there, little one?”

“Yes, yes, I am here,” cried Adalbert; “get me out! get me out!”

The prisoner had recognised Gella’s voice, which was always sweet and soft when she spoke low and kindly. She was stooping over the hole above Adalbert’s head, and a

faint light enabled him to see her face, but she could only make out a black mass.

"Listen," she went on, "I have brought a rope-ladder. I am going to fasten it to the iron bar, and you will climb up it; once at the bar, I can help you through."

As she spoke Gella let something down, which Adalbert could just make out as it glided along the wall. He was not at all nervous about climbing up a rope-ladder, for he had had plenty of practice in that sort of thing at Valneige; but he was afraid of being taken back to the "carriage," and before he put himself into Gella's power the following dialogue took place:

"Gella," began Adalbert, "if I come up, shall you take me back to the 'carriage'?"

"Yes."

"I would rather stay here!"

"But, my poor little fellow, you will die of hunger."

"Does that hurt very much?"

"Oh, yes, very much indeed!"

"Never mind, I would rather die."

But as he said "I would rather die," he instinctively caught hold of the rope-ladder, the only connecting link between him and the world.

"Come, come, don't be silly, but make haste and come up; father has promised not to beat you. You will die to-night, and the black-beetles will eat you."

At the words black-beetles the child felt such a horror come over him that he seized the ladder in both hands; but, on the other hand, he had such a great dread of the life they would lead him in the "carriage" that he determined

to make one last effort to escape from it, and kneeling down under the hole, where he thought Gella might perhaps be able to see him, he stretched out his arms in a supplicating manner, and cried, the tears rolling down his cheeks :

“Oh, Gella, Gella ! if I come up let me run away into the country. I shall perhaps be taken for a little thief, and I shall be put into prison, and get something to eat. I entreat, I beg, I pray of you, don't take me back, don't take me back ! Let me escape !”

“Impossible, impossible, my poor child.”

“Oh, but you will see that it is possible. Oh, don't say no, I entreat you, for the love of God !” and then, remembering that God was unknown in the “carriage,” Adalbert added very softly :

“Have pity on me for the sake of those you love !”

And as she answered nothing he asked :

“Have you never loved any one ?”

“I should think not, indeed !” replied Gella, roughly ; but then she went on in a gentle, caressing voice, “but I love you just now, you poor little chap ; and I got a good beating when I made them promise not to hurt you.”

“You really love, me then ?”

And the child left off crying, climbed up the ladder, and when he felt Gella's sturdy hands upon his head, he breathed more freely, and grateful affection for the poor girl filled his heart.

She helped him up with great dexterity, and his feet on the ladder and his hands resting on the iron bar, he succeeded, after several unsuccessful efforts, in climbing on to the ground. His first thought when he felt himself in

safety was to fling his arms round the ragged girl to whom he owed his life, and thank her for saving him.

“Well,” she said, “you’re not afraid now?”

“Oh, no.”

“Why were you afraid?”

“Because I was not too sure whether you had a heart,” replied Adalbert naïvely, and Gella answered with a heavy sigh:

“Ah well, in our trade there’s no knowing whether one has one or not. That’s the fault of circumstances, but you needn’t be afraid any longer. Let’s take this short cut. Can you walk fast?”

“Oh no, I’m too hungry.”

“Ah, yes, I had forgotten: here is half my bread, which I saved for you.”

Adalbert seized the bread offered, only too glad, gentleman though he was, to eat up the leavings of a poor strolling dancer.

When they got into the fields Gella saw that Adalbert’s legs tottered so he could hardly walk, and the great strong girl, whose goodness of heart had but lain dormant for want of something to call it out, made him climb upon her back, and passing one of his legs under each of her sturdy arms, she made for a group of young oaks, near to which the “carriage” was now stationed. As they went along she asked him why he had run away, and why he had made himself black all over, and he explained how much he had wished to get away from the “carriage” and everybody in it, and how he had hoped that Hercules would not know him again.

"I am not at all surprised, Moustapha," said Gella, and the ice once broken, the new friends chatted together in quite a confidential manner.

"I had not the slightest doubt you were in that cellar. Why did you not answer me yesterday evening when I called you? I suppose you thought me very wicked."

"I did not know what to think. When they beat Natchès you said nothing."

"Ah well, that happens so often that one does not notice it any more, and then, poor boy, he's so stupid, he brings blows upon himself where he might easily avoid them. Now that I think of it, I suppose he is not happy. But, you see, when one has been cuffed ever since one can remember oneself, one doesn't think much of others being treated in the same style."

"But Natchès looks good."

"Say he looks stupid, and I'll agree with you. He understands nothing but turning somersaults. He gets more and more stupid as he grows bigger."

"Perhaps that's because nobody loves him."

"Ah well, perhaps so. I never thought of that. But don't let's talk about him, let's talk about ourselves. You know I love you now."

"Oh yes, because you were beaten for my sake. That was good of you! But tell me what happened when they found I was gone."

"Oh, my father came home furious, you know he said I was to be responsible for you, Moustapha."

"Oh, Gella, will you do me a very great favour?"

"Well, what now?"

“Don’t call me by that horrid name when we are alone. Call me what they did at home—Adalbert.”

“Oh, my dear child, what are you asking? that is really impossible.”

“Well, then, call me what you did just now, when you said so softly, ‘*Little one*, are you there?’”

“Oh, yes, I’ll do that if you like. Well, I was telling you that my father was furious. He set off to search the town, and a woman stopped him, and spoke of the inspector of police. Then he said he saw you, and so saved himself. When we met and you were still missing he fell upon me and beat me; oh! such blows he gave me, such blows that I, who am always so afraid of him, lost my temper and defied him to his face.”

“What, you dared!”

“Yes, I was beside myself; I told him that I was very glad I had lost you, for you were too miserable with him, and I added: I know where he is, but I won’t go and fetch him for fear you should beat him. If he tells of you so much the worse for you.”

“He began to swear again, and to beat me . . .”

“Poor Gella, all that for me!”

“And I ended by shouting in his ear: ‘Very well, you won’t get him back unless you promise not to strike him if I fetch him.’ . . . I don’t know why, but the last words had a wonderfully soothing effect, for he said quite gently, ‘Go and fetch him then, I won’t touch him, and I’ll forbid the mother to punish him.’”

“Oh, dear Gella, how grateful I am to you! But did you know all the time that I was in that cellar?”

“I was sure of it; and I was so miserable about you, more miserable than I ever was before about anybody, and I said to myself: ‘If I leave him there what a terrible death! and if I fetch him out what a terrible life!’”

“But, Gella, if you really love me, why wouldn’t you let me escape?”

“Oh, my poor little fellow, the whole town is in a state of excitement about a lost child, and if you escaped you would be asked questions, and my father would be put in prison; but before he was taken away he would kill me, and you would be the cause. You wouldn’t like to do me harm, would you?”

“Oh, no, no; I will be good,” replied Adalbert, affectionately, whose gratitude had made him very fond of his strange protectress already.

Adalbert said no more, but kept his eyes fixed on a lantern in the distance which dimly lit up the young oak trees. It was the lantern of the “carriage.”

When they were about a hundred yards from it Gella put the child down, and took his hand. All thought of flight was now abandoned. Adalbert would not have minded being the cause of Hercules being put in prison, but to bring down, the angry vengeance of such a man upon Gella—Gella who had rescued him from his dreadful situation—would be too shameful a piece of ingratitude. So he walked quietly beside her, taking two steps to her one.

When they reached the “carriage” the poor boy began to tremble all over, but Gella squeezed his hand, and he took heart again; her very presence was a protection.

Re-assuming her rough manners, partly from force of

habit, and partly as a matter of policy, Gella cried abruptly :

“ Well, heres your little brat. Come, Moustapha, climb up, and be quick about it.”

Every one was asleep except the man of the iron hand, and he said not a word. Adalbert, almost dying with fright, climbed back into the “carriage,” followed by Gella. The door was shut, and Adalbert scarcely dared to breathe.

Then ensued a terrible scene, which baffles description. The gipsy, indignant at Gella’s carelessness, had been nursing his anger all this time. He had promised not to touch Adalbert, and he kept his word, but he vented all his fury on his unfortunate daughter. She had upset all his plans, and their route would have to be changed, as they would have to recross the Rhine, and keep quiet until the rumours set afloat in the town were forgotten. A few fierce broken words from between lips compressed with rage told what was coming, accompanied by a look which Gella knew only too well, and which resembled nothing so much as the glare of a tiger about to spring upon his prey. She was foolish enough to utter a few deprecatory words, at which her father flung himself upon her and began beating her savagely.

It really seemed for a moment as if the unnatural father had forgotten she was his daughter, and was determined to put an end to her then and there. Poor little Adalbert was beside himself with distress, he rushed forward, and clung to the arm of the tyrant, receiving, unheeded, some of the blows intended for Gella.

No one else in the caravan moved or took any notice, except little Tilly who, with nothing on but her little shirt, run forward with clasped hands and streaming eyes, looking like an angel sent direct from Heaven. Adalbert thought with a shudder that it would be her turn next; but no, the fury of Hercules seemed to be passing over, for, with a muttered curse, he turned away and went and sat down on the outside of the "carriage." A few minutes later the "carriage" was moving again in the direction of the Rhine, the weary horse urged on to its utmost speed with many a blow from the master's whip.

Gella, pale as death and half fainting, lay stretched on the floor between Adalbert and Tilly. The latter was soon called away by the old woman, and dared not disobey; but the recaptured fugitive was allowed to remain beside her who had said to him, "I love you," and he watched her anxiously, thinking she must be going to die, because her black locks were dyed crimson with the blood which was pouring from a wound in her head.

"You see," she said in a low voice, with her eyes still closed, "what will happen to me if you run away again, I shall be quite killed next time!"

And Adalbert, forgetting his parents, his home, and his own country, in his horror at the sight of the blood which had been shed for him, threw himself at the feet of the poor girl, his heart swelling with pity and gratitude, and took this solemn oath: "Gella, I swear to you that I will never run away again when you are responsible for me; I give you my word of honour!"

Gella opened her great eyes full of scalding tears, and,

looking into Adalbert's earnest, loving face, she answered briefly, "I believe you."

All night long Adalbert watched his new friend's suffering. With his own hands he bathed her wounds, and washed away the blood from her face and hair, wishing he could think of something to relieve her, and at last he whispered: "Take courage, there is a Heaven above us!"

The next day, when he saw Hercules again, Adalbert remembered his oath, and felt that he was not only the prisoner of his dreaded master, but that he was bound to remain with him by all the ties of gratitude and honour.

CHAPTER XI.

ADALBERT'S NAME UPON THE WALL.

VERY pretty and tasty did the little white house look when the blinds were at last drawn up on the return of spring, and very glad were its owners to get back to it. It was the perfection of a country residence, like a little nest surrounded by clustering leaves, neither very grand nor very poor looking, but a peaceful retreat, just the thing for quiet lonely people with no love of show.

Of this class were M. and Madame Deschamps, the happy possessors of this little cottage. They had of course been young like all the rest of the world, and now they were old, as every one must be who lives long

enough. From the very first, when they were obliged to reside in a town, and their babies had not done teething before they had said : "When our children are married we will get ourselves a little box in the country."

And now the time had come. Thirty long years had passed over the heads of the happy couple, who had been from the first well suited to each other, but had now become so entirely of one mind that M. Deschamps, who hated cream in his chocolate when he married, now took it as a matter of course ; and Madame Deschamps, who had detested dogs, had become sincerely attached to her husband's faithful Tom.

The worthy pair had been spending the winter with their married daughters, entering into all their cares, and sharing all their pleasures. Happy as they had been, however, it was with fresh delight that they returned to their little "box," which had come to them through the death of a relation, and which, what with its solitude, garden full of flowers, its pond full of fish, and the shady trees all round it, left nothing to be desired. Perhaps its chief charm lay in its seclusion, for you couldn't even hear a bit of scandal without walking some hundred yards !

In this favoured spot everybody was fond of everybody else. The master and mistress were waited upon by a certain Sophie, who was all that became one whose name means wisdom : a model of order and economy, who acted as cook, housemaid, nurse, or housekeeper as occasion required. She generally went, however, by the name of Nurse.

The only other servant was Sophie's husband, Julian, who, like his wife, held many offices, and was a regular jack-of-all-trades.

We must not forget to introduce Tom, a faithful, honest, sober-minded dog, who, for want of a more suitable companion, had struck up a great friendship with an equally well conducted cat, a grimalkin who never dreamt of such a thing as a theft, but was content to pace behind his mistress when she made her rounds in the garden, stopping when she stopped in a solicitous manner, which afforded the good old lady ever fresh delight.

A pair of sparrows belonging to Sophie, which she kept in a large cage in the kitchen; a cock and a few fowls, whose duty it was to keep their mistress supplied with fresh eggs, completed the ménage; and the "pond," which was not much more than a pool, was a source of endless gratification to M. Deschamps and of anxiety to his careful wife, for the good man had a positive passion for fishing, and would sit for hours with his feet on the damp grass on a wet day, watching his line hanging as motionless as if it were in a shop window, and feeling fully repaid if he caught so much as a minnow.

"Of course I know he's well wrapped up," Madame Deschamps would say to herself, "and he's got cork soles in his boots, and overshoes on; but for all that, I'd much rather he'd stay indoors and read, write, or even make boxes."

We must explain that carpentering was another of M. Deschamps' hobbies, and that he had made one of the

rooms of the ground floor into a workshop, which his wife had fitted up with green curtains to keep it cool in the summer, and with a stove to make it warm in the winter. She liked to hear her "dear Raymond" hammering or planing, for there was no fear of his catching cold or getting over-heated in his little workshop, where he turned out dozens of boxes, fitting into each other, for the delight of his grandchildren. Gladly would Madame Deschamps have turned the key upon him on wet days; for when was a fisherman known to listen to reason? Do not the fish bite better in wet weather than in fine? and could any one expect more of poor M. Deschamps than that he should submit to be half stifled by wraps when he went out in the rain? Sometimes the much-enduring man would say: "What nonsense it is! Have I not a perfect right to get wet through if I choose?" and Madame Deschamps would venture on no further remonstrance than an ominous grunt, for she would not have quarrelled for the world; but next time she passed the kitchen door she would look in at Sophie with a meaning shake of the head, for she knew the good old "nurse" was on her side, and would say, thinking of her own Julian:

"Well I never! but there now, ma'am, they're all alike, these men!"

And with that she would begin thinking what present she should give her "man" on their wedding-day, or on his birthday, whilst her mistress would busy herself in airing some clean clothes for her rebellious spouse, ready for him to put on directly he came in; for she had found out that men are always more willing to put on what is

laid out ready for them than to go to a wardrobe and fetch what they want for themselves.

Although it was the cause of so much trouble, Madame Deschamps did not bear any ill-will against the pond, on the contrary, she took quite a pride in it for her husband's sake. She it was who had the banks swept and kept clear of rubbish, and with her own hands she had planted a weeping-willow beside it, which now, thanks to her constant care, was growing to be a goodly tree, drooping over the water, and casting its shadow across as prettily as could be. Every day, too, after dinner, Madame Deschamps might be seen at the edge of the pond calling to the fish in a caressing voice, and feeding them with crumbs and dainty morsels of bread cut up on purpose for them. It pleased her husband to see her do this, and so she never missed a day; and as for the fish, they didn't know their friends from their enemies, for they were ready to run away from M. Deschamps, who was so fond of them, and to hurry to meet his wife, who did not care for them a bit.

Another great source of interest was the kitchen garden, in which M. Deschamps and Julian worked as heartily as the sons of the labourer in La Fontaine's well-known fable. The onions were fine; the spinage superb; the radishes as plentiful as possible; and lettuces cropped up everywhere, even where they had not been sown. It was but a little place this kitchen-garden, with only two paths a hundred yards across each way at the most, but what did that matter? There was something for every one to do in it. The master and Julian dug and planted, the

mistress pulled up the weeds directly they showed their heads, and Sophie picked everything she could, and threw it into her saucepan.

All this will give you some idea of the quiet, peaceful life led by the inmates of the White House, as the pretty little villa was called, and you will understand how glad they always were to welcome the spring. The only thing to break the peaceful monotony of the house and garden was a visit from some little grandson, niece, or nephew, who would never tire of running round the narrow paths with Tom or the cat; but the good old couple never invited more than one child at a time, for two might quarrel, and that would create too much disturbance.

It was with even greater pleasure than usual that Madame Deschamps this year made her preparations for the return home. The country always agreed better than the town with her husband, and their daughter lived so near to them that they could easily run over for the day. Besides, they had a few friends in the little village hard by, and could often have them in to a good dinner or a little evening party, so that there was no fear of being dull.

Even in the winter the little villa was not entirely deserted. A gardener went over every now and then to dig up the beds or sow some early potatoes; and M. Deschamps would indulge himself in three or four visits just to see how things were going on, and to give the gardener a few directions. He always made a point of going into the drawing-room, which was his wife's

favourite sanctum, and winding up the clock. This clock was a great treasure to Madame Deschamps, for her husband had given it to her on the first anniversary of their marriage. Its clear ringing strokes could be heard all over the house, and even in the cellar. It was adorned with a fine bronze group of the Mother of the Gracchi with her noble boys. Unfortunately all Madame Deschamps's children were girls, or she would doubtless have brought up sons as ready to defend their country as those of Cornelia; but she herself felt no regret on that score. Her daughters were all good wives and mothers, and what more could any one desire?

It was on the 22nd of March that the family returned in the year of which we are writing. Ah, how much there always is to do on the day of one's arrival at home after a long absence! Every one was in the best of humours, and by a natural division of labour it fell to Julian's share to sweep away the cobwebs: armed with a good sized broom he carried all before him, like Attila with his hordes, making way, however, unlike him, for the sweet influences of civilisation as represented by Sophie and her household utensils. Following her husband at a respectable distance, the good woman was ready to carry off the dead bodies of the victims in her dustpan as soon as ever she was fully assured that the victory was won. Soon the two had reduced everything above ground to something like order, and left the mistress to put the finishing touches, which she did by dusting the furniture washing, the ornaments, the clock, and so forth, and feeling more than rewarded when all was done by

her dear Raymond saying, "How nice everything here looks!"

Sophie's next care after the cleaning was done was to see about dinner, and, in order to get a good blazing fire in the kitchen with as little delay as possible, she got a candle and set off for the cellar to fetch a few logs and chips of wood. She goes down the stairs, she opens the door, she looks in . . . But what does she see? A plank by the barrel, the little coal there was left scattered about in every direction, and a few steps from her a yellow ribbon with the ends knotted together. . . .

Perceiving by these signs that some one had recently been in the cellar, which was always kept so carefully locked, Sophie at first felt a not unnatural sensation of fear. But as she had no mind to be laughed at by her husband, she looked carefully about everywhere before she gave the alarm; and at last, having made sure that there was not so much as a cat in the cellar, she called to Julian and her master and mistress in as firm and courageous a voice as she could command, to come and see what she had found.

The men were greatly surprised, and Madame Deschamps, one of whose weaknesses it was to be afraid of her own shadow, made the most of the present opportunity. All four agreed that it was very extraordinary, and as it was quite inexplicable to them all, the explanations hazarded were numerous, and all equally wide of the mark. When there was really nothing more to be said, and all began to feel that they were not doing much towards getting dinner ready, they prepared to remount the stairs; but as she was turning round Madame Deschamps caught

sight of some words written on the wall with a piece of coal. We all know the story of King Belshazzar, and remember with what horror he was seized at the sight of the mysterious hand tracing the three words he could not read upon the wall of the banquetting-house. Poor Sidonie Deschamps was scarcely less dismayed when she read the names: "Papa! Mamma! Camilla! Eugène! Frederick! Rosette! Valneige!"

M. Deschamps himself looked grave and sad, and Julian, who had once been a soldier, allowed a few rather strong expressions to fall from his lips in the excitement of the moment. As for Sophie, her composure completely upset; she crossed herself, and blurted out that she believed the Evil One had been in the cellar, and that nothing would ever induce her to set foot in it again.

"Come, come," said her master, rather sternly, "before you allow yourself to get into such a fright just consider how little ground there is for fear. Some one has been here there is no doubt, but the devil's business is with souls, not with empty bottles, and he is not likely to waste his time writing names on walls: most likely those names only mean innocent family recollections." Sophie breathed rather more freely, for she had a great respect for M. Deschamps' opinion on every subject except fishing. She still held her candle in her hand, and, moving it up and down the wall, to see if there was anything else to discover, she suddenly pointed to some words not before noticed, and exclaimed:

"More writing! oh, read it, read it, mistress dear!"

Her mistress read it in a voice shaken by feeling:

"I was stolen because I was disobedient. It was all my fault."

Lower down still were the words:

"My name is Adalbert de Valneige. . . I shall be nine years old this evening. . . I am hungry!"

None but a mother could realise good Madame Deschamps' feelings at that moment. A child had been shut up in this cellar alone and deserted. He had wept there! He had been hungry!

She picked up the yellow ribbon, and said with a sob:

"Oh, God! and the poor child has a mother!"

Her husband took her hand: "Come, Sidonie," he said, "calm yourself, don't take it too much to heart. I'll go to the police inspector early to-morrow morning and have a legal investigation set on foot. Perhaps, with God's help, we may be able to trace the poor little fellow."

"As you will, Raymond, but I shall keep the ribbon. I will show it if need be, but I won't give it up."

"Why not?"

"Because when the child has been restored to his mother I mean to send her the ribbon, and the poor woman will keep it all her life as a souvenir."

"Rather a melancholy one," observed Sophie.

"Ah, Sophie, *you* are not a mother! . . . She will think the ribbon a melancholy souvenir, as everybody must; but for all that she will look at it when she is alone, and touch it tenderly."

The maternal instinct was now so thoroughly awakened in Madame Deschamps' heart that, as they all went upstairs together, her thoughts flew to her little grand-

daughter Geneviève, who was always ready to run rather too far from her parents or her nurse when she was out rolling her hoop.

"I must write and warn her mother to-morrow," exclaimed Madame Deschamps. "Suppose they were to run away with the poor little girl too!"

And so this one event was the cause of very different feelings in each member of the party. M. Deschamps, a sensible and practical man, thought of police inspectors and agents, legal investigations, letters to the newspapers, and so forth. Madame Deschamps thought of the grief of Adalbert's mother, and shuddered at the bare idea of a similar misfortune happening to one of her own daughters. Sophie, much relieved that the Evil One had had nothing to do with the matter, and looking forward to telling the tale some hundreds of times, and showing the mysterious lines to all her acquaintances, had a secret dread that her onion sauce would not be done enough; whilst Julian, who was something of a mathematician, wondered how in the world the child had got out of the cellar. To get in was easy enough, but to get out was quite another matter. Finally, he decided that he must have had help; then he noticed how the door of the cellar had been gnawed by the rats; and finally, without however forgetting Adalbert, he laid schemes of vengeance against them.

CHAPTER XII.

ADALBERT IS EVERYWHERE THE SUBJECT OF CONVERSATION.

"AH! so you've got back at last."

"Yes, and we've brought the fine weather with us."

"A good thing too; what a winter we've had, to be sure! Such rain, I declare my legs have been quite stiff with pottering about in the wet."

"I can well believe it!"

"But it's no use grumbling, Madame Julian, as long as there are four seasons in the year we must take the weather as it comes."

"Well, let's hope you made some good bargains, at all events."

"Oh, I've sold nothing but apples this year, and as long as there are any to sell I shall go on selling them. As for violets and early potatoes, there are none to be had."

"That's a pity, but there are worse troubles than that in the world."

"Ah, indeed, neighbour Tourtebonne, I believe you!"

This dialogue took place in front of the White House, the two women standing by the truck. They were always very pleased to meet after their separation for the winter, and generally had a chat together about twice a week. On this particular day each had something special to communicate to the other without knowing that it was the same subject which agitated them both, and each was

anxious to lead up to her story. Sophie, seeing that the early potatoes had nothing to do with what was on her mind, tried to put things in better train by saying:

"Well, yes, here we are back again . . . and I'm not sorry for it. For my part I love the country; I've only one thing to complain of here, and that's the loneliness."

"You don't say so, with a nice little town a hundred yards off?"

"I do though, and if we were only ten yards off it would be much better."

"You don't mean to say you are getting nervous?—that is a good joke!"

"I used not to be, but I am getting so."

"But whatever can there be to be afraid of here? The house is as strong as a fort when it's shut up; no one could possibly get in!"

"Somebody did, for all that!"

"Through the keyhole?"

"No, through the mouth of the cellar."

"Don't tell me! Why, I couldn't get one of my legs into it."

That was very likely, for you must know that Madame Tourtebonne was a very big woman, as round and plump as possible, and being quite used to this state of things it never struck her that slim folks might squeeze in where she could not. Sophie's fears therefore appeared to her altogether unfounded, and her face expressed such utter incredulity that the cook, only too glad of the excuse went on:

“You don’t believe me? Come and see for yourself, then.”

At this the truck was wheeled into the yard, and Sophie, lighting her candle, led the way to the cellar.

“Clever fellows they must be,” laughed good-natured Madame Tourtebonne, “who got into your cellar through the hole at the top, why it’s as much as I can do to get down your stairs. They really are absurdly narrow. What could the builder have been thinking of?”

Groping along as best she could, for the candle did not give much light, Madame Tourtebonne at last found herself in the cellar. Once on level ground, Sophie gave a full and particular account of all that had taken place the day of the arrival at home, describing her own fright, the position of the planks, the yellow ribbon, repeating what the master and mistress had said, and what Julian had said; and when the applewoman had been duly prepared for a startling revelation, her friend made her turn towards the wall and read the words written with coal.

When she came to “My name is Adalbert,” she suddenly stopped short and exclaimed:

“It is he, my dear! it is he! Poor little fellow! poor little darling! To think of that now! I never could have believed it!”

So overcome was Madame Tourtebonne by this coincidence that she recoiled several paces, and would have fallen on the empty bottles if Sophie had not called out:

“Take care!”

At that the good creature, fearing danger behind her, flung herself forwards, and stepped with a crash into the

pile of coal dust, some of which flew all over her clean white apron. Too much excited to notice this, although she was generally most scrupulously neat, she kept repeating, "It is he! It is he!" until at last Sophie thought she must be going out of her mind. She soon saw, however, that she was mistaken, for her old friend, taking out her handkerchief and wiping her eyes, proceeded to give an account of her having met a pretty fair little fellow last November, who looked very frail and delicate, and, to use her favourite expression, had slipped through her fingers. In ten minutes Sophie knew all there was to know, including the gloomy looks of the pretended father, his dread of the inspector of police, the words extorted from M. Baptist, who had witnessed the whole, and their joint communication to the police made the very same evening.

If the truck full of commodities for sale had not been waiting up-stairs, and if the breast of veal on the fire had not required attention, there is no knowing how long the two women would have remained in the cellar. Madame Tourtebonne's conjectures were inexhaustible; she was full of fancies about the boy, and had become so fond of him that she sometimes spoke of him as *my* poor child.

Sophie, of course, told her master and mistress of what Madame Tourtebonne had said, and many were the eager questions they asked her. Only too delighted to see the matter in such good hands, she told all she knew, and a good deal more. M. Deschamps, without believing all he heard, felt that her testimony might prove useful; and

Madame Deschamps, who had done nothing but think of the child since the discovery, began to have fresh hope of his restoration to his mother.

Many indeed were the castles in the air built by the good old soul as she lay awake of a night, in all of which the "hero of the cellar," as Sophie called him, played the principal part. All these wonderful fancies were, however, rather scouted by M. Deschamps and Julian, and now and then the former remarked with quiet irony that he thought he had heard rather too much about Adalbert, and that one well-timed effort on his part would do more to further his interests than all the talking and sighs in the world. To this there could be no reply, and so Sidonie would take out her work and introduce some other subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADALBERT HAS NOW BEEN EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN THE
"CARRIAGE."

THE poor little exile from Valneige was growing up far from the paternal roof. To a certain extent his body had become accustomed to the rudeness of his present life, but his heart and spirit still rebelled.

Through it all, however, he did not lose hope or courage, and he never forgot how often his father had told him that the very worst thing that could happen to any one in trouble was to become discouraged.

“Ah!” he thought to himself, “I am a man now like papa in everything but age and size. I must be brave!”

Poor child, surrounded by strangers, he was sustained by the remembrance of his home; and his misfortunes, by early maturing his judgment, had taught him better to appreciate the value of his father's noble character.

Natchès was unfortunately no companion for him, as his intelligence was completely blunted. Servile obedience was his one idea, and his unconsciousness of the horrors around him did much to soften his situation.

With Tilly, however, it was different, she was so weak and suffering that Adalbert could not but take a tender interest in her. She had a troublesome cough, which seldom left her, and her chest was so delicate that a mother would have been anxious about her; but poor little Tilly did not know what a mother meant. As she was pretty, docile, and quick, she never gave any one an excuse for finding fault with her, but for all that the old grandmother managed sometimes to pick a quarrel with her. If she was getting ready for a fair, and the poor child looked ill, she was scolded, so she did all she could to hide the increase of “her cold” as she called it. This cold was in fact general debility, often accompanied by slight fever and a readiness to shed tears without any apparent cause. At such times she would say to Adalbert, who was always so considerate for her weakness:

“I have got a pain all over me; but I don't mind it much.”

The two children seldom talked, however. Adalbert was more closely watched than ever, not only to prevent

a second attempt at escape, but for fear that he should burst out with some bold protest against his detention. But, in spite of the constant surveillance, the little invalid had managed to tell him that she had no recollection of her early childhood, and that the "carriage" was the only home she had ever known. Although she had never seen any other style of living than that of the gipsies, she shrank instinctively from all they said or did; her appearance alone would have been enough to prove that she was of another race than theirs, and her reluctance to call the old woman "grandmother" showed that she had some consciousness of the difference herself. She was astonished to find in Adalbert one who combined force of will with a tender heart, and who could yield without servility. In her rare talks with him she learnt that she too had a soul, and that there was a heaven for her.

"Do you think I shall go to heaven?" she asked one day with touching simplicity.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure you will; for mamma said every one goes who wishes to do right, who does not do wrong on purpose, and who loves the good God with all his heart."

"I did not love Him before, because I did not know Him; but tell me, do you think it will be a very long time, a *very* long time before I go to heaven?"

"We can never tell those things beforehand."

"I don't think it will be long myself, because of my cold. When I cough I have a pain in my back—perhaps that is death coming, and after death heaven!"

"Perhaps, but I don't know."

And so the poor little prisoner imparted the good

lessons he had received from his parents to the patient invalid, and when she wanted to prove her affectionate gratitude, she would watch for a private opportunity, and softly repeat his own name :

“ Adalbert, Adalbert.”

Which always gave the little exile the greatest pleasure.

Meanwhile the great rough Gella became more and more attached to her little protégé, although her manner of speaking to him remained as rude and abrupt as ever. Adalbert felt quite secure of her affection, and proved his gratitude to her by rendering her every little service in his power.

When, as now and then happened, commissions or some work connected with the wandering household separated these two from the rest of the party, Gella dropped her rough manners, and became gentle and kind. She too, like Tilly, discovered that she had a soul and a heart into the bargain : a heart which was warmed with something of maternal solicitude for the child she had saved. In her intercourse with Adalbert she received more than she gave, but she was not quite so ready to accept all he told her about heaven and the future as the simple little Tilly. Sometimes she would say :

“ Come now, little one, I don't understand much about these things. I'm not clever, I never learnt to do anything but work for my daily bread ; I'm a stupid girl, I am. The good God's not likely to love a good-for-nothing girl like me, who lives without knowing why or how.”

And Adalbert answered :

“But mamma said He loves all the world, and are not you one of the people who make up the world? Oh, Gella, He knows you, He knows everybody’s name, and everybody’s face!”

The boy’s voice was so earnest, and he looked so truthful and loving as he spoke, that the poor girl was often more than half persuaded, and felt her heart glow with something of her little teacher’s fervour.

One thing, which had now for some time puzzled Adalbert, was Gella’s great desire to know how to write, or at least how to write certain words which were always the same. There was not apparently any connection between these words, yet Gella had evidently some important scheme in view which she was most careful to conceal. Often when she was alone with the prisoner she would take a stick, and with it make a clumsy copy on the ground of the letters of which he gave her a pattern.

“But why do you always choose the same words?” inquired the young teacher.

“Hold your tongue, master,” Gella would answer, laughing. “Now make me some *a*’s, and *f*’s, and *o*’s, that I may write *father*, *you*, &c., &c. I have my reasons.”

Then the child, without understanding why she wanted them, wrote the words with a little stick on the ground, which his pupil copied so awkwardly that he would rub the whole out by walking over it, pronouncing it “Bad, very bad.” These mysterious lessons were quite a recreation to the poor child in his exile from Valneige.

On the other hand Gella taught Adalbert all manner of things. She it was who made him do what she called "his exercises" every day: that is to say, she made him jump, wrestle, and bend and swing his limbs about, to make him supple and active. He learnt very readily, and soon became so expert that the master—sending forth a cloud of smoke from his big pipe, which was his way of expressing satisfaction—remarked that he was a promising boy. His natural aptitude and wish to please Gella brought him forward so rapidly in the one study which was required of him, that it was not long before he was considered fit to figure with his fellow-sufferers at the fairs and village fêtes. A sad lot for a boy like him, to be dressed like a rope-dancer, to play tricks, dance and jump until he was ready to drop with fatigue, and finally to go round amongst some two hundred spectators with a wooden bowl to collect a few pence. Poor child, after each performance he felt ready to cry, and his little heart swelled with indignation. His costume, pretty as it was, seemed to him a positive disgrace, and the applause of the audience made him ashamed.

He had been brought up so very differently. His parents had taught him that children should never try to attract the notice of strangers, that good manners consist in replying when spoken to, in never speaking first, and never showing off any little accomplishment unless told to do so. The remembrance of all this added keenness to the mortification of poor little Adalbert at being made the sport of a crowd of strangers, and having to perform on a raised platform for their amusement.

Natchès, on the contrary, never seemed happier than on the days of the great fairs. It was a positive delight to him to don his clown's dress, and as he performed his somersaults and antics very well, the master would generally testify his satisfaction by giving him some little present, such as a gingerbread man, or a big apple puff. His generosity never carried him further than that, and Natchès was very content. To escape beating was a pleasure in itself, and to get even the smallest present into the bargain rendered his exultation beyond all bounds. Of no very high natural intelligence, he had been rendered yet more stupid by repressive training, and his occasional fits of obstinacy, conquered by blows, were the only signs he ever gave of individuality.

You will now understand how much excitement an approaching exhibition caused amongst the strolling players. Hercules, his rusty cloak laid aside for a time, and his matted locks trimmed and flung back from his forehead, would assume a tight-fitting flesh-coloured suit, relieved by short dark pantaloons well calculated to show off the manly beauty of his mighty limbs. Thus attired, it could not be denied that there was about him a kind of rude majesty such as we admire in a lion, but from which we prefer to be separated by some strong iron bars.

As for Karik, he decked himself out in the most grotesque costume he could find, and lost nothing by the contrast. Once set going, the boy would bring out one stupid joke after another, each one greeted by a loud roar of laughter from the crowd. Even Adalbert was

constrained to laugh sometimes, not at Karik's wit, of which he understood nothing, but at the absurd appearance of the gaping mouths of the spectators, who were ready to fling an extra penny to the young rogue who amused them so well.

Little Tilly, in a low body, a very short white and gold petticoat, flesh-coloured stockings, sky-blue sleeves, a wreath of roses on her head, pearls on her neck, and bracelets on her arms, looked, as you may suppose, extremely pretty. She had a natural air of distinction, her delicate complexion added to the charm of her appearance, and the master was wild with delight when he saw her dancing the polka with Adalbert, whilst Karik and Natchès produced a horrible hurly-burly of sound called music, which did little more than serve to beat the time.

The best and concluding portion of every programme, however, was Gella's dancing. When she appeared in her black velvet costume braided with silver, and made her courtesy to the people with a graceful wave of her arms, there was a general rush to the platform. Adalbert always watched her with a fresh astonishment, bordering on admiration. Her black hair was adorned with artificial flowers, her large dark eyes flashed with animation, and when she smiled she had a very sweet expression. Altogether there was something imposing in her appearance; she looked like a beautiful Spanish girl, and on fête days she went by the name of Gella of Andalusia. She could play the castanets very cleverly, and she danced the cachoucha splendidly, to the great delight of the spectators, who clapped and shouted in admiration, and some-

times even threw her flowers. Adalbert watched her with affectionate surprise, mingled with a little shame for her. He loved her because she was so good to him, and he would rather have seen her at her needlework or household duties than amusing a set of common people who did not know anything about her.

The child noticed, too, that if Gella had what was called "a success" that she did not seem happy after it. It left her exhausted and out of spirits, and when she had put on her old clothes again she would often say to Adalbert:

"You needn't think I throw myself about like that for my own amusement, little one. I do it because it's my trade. I'd much rather be like most women, and live quietly at home, than be obliged to show off before a lot of lazy people who have no more sense than cabbages."

After giving vent to her noble thoughts in language but little fitted for them, the poor girl would heave a heavy sigh, and Adalbert, young as he was, fully understood all that that sigh implied, and something of respect was mingled with his affectionate gratitude for Gella.

CHAPTER XIV.

ADALBERT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE FOURTEENTH.

THE birds still sang in the leafy shades of Valneige, they alone were unsaddened by Adalbert's loss, for they had never known him.

Yes, Valneige was as charming as ever. Nature was clothed in all the varied suits of spring. The little brook gurgled on as before, the sunbeams tinged the fields with gold, the young heifers and the little lambs frisked about in the meadows, enjoying the sweet fresh air, and rejoicing in being near their mothers.

At the farm all was activity. The farm-labourers went and came, sowing seed, ploughing, and looking forward to the future harvest. It was going to be a good year, and everybody was glad; but what a difference there was in the house itself, between the peaceful contentment of former times, and the constant sadness and anxiety which now prevailed.

These eighteen months had changed everything. The boys were at college, and Camilla was becoming a young lady, and her mother's constant companion. Just now the Easter holidays were drawing to a close, and the whole family would be together for a few days longer. Every thing had been done to make these holidays pleasant to Eugène and Frederick, that they might carry back with them to school pleasant recollections of their home. Madame de Valneige knew well enough that children cannot bear trouble well, and at their changeable age recreation and distraction are positively necessary. So she took pains to give them all the country amusements she could, and made up walking parties and picnics, or sent them for long drives. She even had some targets put up in the park, where they practised shooting, and actually competed for a prize—a prize about which there was a great deal of mystery, for no one had seen it

but Madame de Valneige herself, or had any idea of its shape, size, or name.

“What could it have been then?”

M. de Valneige was often struck with admiration at his wife's courage. She really seemed sometimes to forget her trouble, that there might be nothing to mar the delight of the school-boys. His own intentions were as good as those of the patient and gentle Adeline, but since he lost his boy his health had been so broken down that he could not conceal his growing anxiety. He had written piles of letters, and taken many journeys without any definite result. The horrible doubt as to Adalbert's fate wasted his strength, and he sank into a kind of consumption, shunning company, and never mentioning his boy's name. The others, out of respect for him, also avoided all reference to their common grief, except Rosette, who could not help talking at every opportunity of her little darling. Even when she was alone the good creature would murmur over her everlasting knitting :

“If only the naughty little chap had been obedient all this would not have happened. A child does not understand danger, his only safety is in obedience.”

But whilst these sad thoughts were occupying the minds of the elders, the holidays were wearing away. There was no arresting their course ; only two days more and Frederick and Eugène would have to go back to school, and although they seldom mentioned it, this fact was never out of their thoughts. Not that they disliked their life at school, no, they were not like the naughty, lazy boys who would be glad to do nothing all day ; on the

contrary, they hoped to grow up to be men, and were ready to learn everything likely to make them useful members of society. They were conscious, too, of the good results to character of the free and easy intercourse with other boys of their own age at school, and, moreover, they broke the monotony of their studies by many a good wrestling match, the charms of which every one knows in spite of the bruises which are generally left behind.

Only two days more! Well, they must make the most of them, and the boys were disposed to keep close to their mother, as if they wished to carry back with them a vivid recollection of her every look.

"Come," said Madame de Valneige at breakfast, "the time has arrived to award the mysterious prize to the winner of the shooting match."

"Hurrah!" shouted the boys, and "Hurrah!" shouted Camilla, out of sympathy with them.

"We won't wait till the last day," added mamma, "for I know that, although we go off at the last in good spirits like brave boys, we can't help feeling too much sinking of the heart to enjoy anything thoroughly."

"Ah, mother dear, how well you know!" and the brothers threw their arms round her neck, whilst she smiled up in their faces and said:

"Well, I shall give the prizes after dinner to-morrow, at dessert."

"What, the prizes!"

"Yes, the prizes, there are only two of you, and you have both done admirably, often with skill equally matched. Your father has kept an account of the hits

you have each made, and though one stands higher than the other, that other is so little behind him that I really can't let either of you go without some token of honour. So there will be a first prize and a second prize, and a few friends, and a good dinner, and some champagne!" . . .

Then ensued clapping of hands and shouts of delight! A little party at Valneige! It was the first time Frederick and Eugène had had such a pleasure for eighteen months. They had had plenty of fun, but it had always been amongst themselves. Now they were to send out invitations to their friends. They quickly chose their three favourite neighbours, Paul, Edward, and Christian, with whom they were very intimate. Capital fellows, who were always laughing, and understood nothing better than the good old maxim, "Play to-day, business to-morrow."

They accepted the invitation, and their parents were to come with them: there would be a grand dinner. That is to say there would be plenty of friendly people round a well-spread table, for as to the formality and etiquette of what is generally called a "grand dinner," there was never anything of the kind at Valneige, where, as Rosette expressed it, they "wore their hearts upon their sleeves."

The next day there were many merry, noisy scenes in the park. Paul, Edward, and Christian arrived quite early. There were five of them altogether, just the right number for a good romp. Rosette made a futile effort to give some of her wise advice at the beginning of the day, in the hope of preventing bruises and spoilt clothes, but she might just as well have harangued the Vandals as they were about to rush down upon a doomed country.

The good old nurse saw how it was, and beat a dignified retreat, making the back kitchen a kind of intrenchment, where, being unable to see the enemy, there was some chance of her forgetting him; and taking up her everlasting knitting she stitched away furiously, without a moment's pause.

The boys pressed Philip into their service for the nonce, and as he had had a private hint from his master, he was ready to oblige them in everything. He even had the black horse put into the open carriage, and let them drive round the park, with Frederick acting coachman, Eugène footman, and the three visitors gentlemen in the carriage.

Other amusements succeeded this. Philip actually arranged a sail in the boat—only fancy what a delight!—on the one condition that the little gentlemen should give him authority enough to prevent them from going to the bottom of the river. All these pleasures, only interrupted by a good lunch, lasted until five o'clock, at which time the parents of the young visitors arrived. M. and Madame de Valneige received them with the greatest cordiality, and at six o'clock thirteen persons entered the large dining-room, where dinner was elegantly served, the servants rejoicing at seeing a little gaiety restored to Valneige.

Everything went on merrily enough, but once Madame de Valneige had much ado to control her emotion, for Edward suddenly exclaimed:

“Oh, how funny, there are thirteen of us. Some people are nervous of sitting down thirteen.”

"Very absurd of them," laughed Paul, "for I am sure we are very comfortable." And M. de Valneige, always ready to say a word in season to his children, spoke rather strongly on the foolishness of such fancies.

"But, papa," said Eugène, "what can have been the origin of the superstition?"

"It probably takes its rise," replied his father, "from there having been thirteen people at the Last Supper, and amongst those thirteen the traitor Judas, who betrayed his Master. Horror of the crime of Judas, combined with reverence for the Holy One who suffered from it, most likely made the early Christians shrink from making merry with a party of thirteen; but this innocent religious sentiment has long ago degenerated into a silly fancy that one of a party of thirteen must die in the course of a year, as if God had not pre-ordained the exact moment when each one of us must appear before Him. With most people, however, the prejudice against thirteen is merely an unmeaning instinct left by some old nursery tale, and they shrink from the fatal number like nervous people from an alarm for which they know there is no foundation; and for the rest, none of those present are foolish enough to attach any importance to the famous number about which a great deal of unnecessary fuss is made."

Everybody assented to what M. de Valneige had said, and he added with a smile:

"As for my wife, I find that, in spite of her strictness in religious observances, she is proof against foolish popular superstitions. Am I not right, Adeline? Confess that you hardly noticed that we are thirteen."

“You are mistaken, I noticed it to-day for the first time.”

“And why, I should like to know?”

At this question Madame de Valneige, generally so calm, was visibly agitated; her eyes filled with tears, and without looking at her husband she exclaimed, as if in spite of herself:

“Because he would have been the fourteenth!”

M. de Valneige sighed deeply, and sank into a melancholy silence, and the poor mother, vexed with herself at having let this reference to the subject ever in her thoughts escape from her, tried to do away with its effects. But it was of no use, and the rest of the meal was eaten in silence, but for some few remarks from the children, who were eager for the dessert to be put on the table, for the sake of what was to come with it.

At last it was there! Plates of fruit, cakes, and bonbons were handed round the table, and then Madame de Valneige took the first prize, won by Frederick, from an épergne which Camilla had decked with flowers. It was a box containing a pretty silver watch with a chain and key. The first watch he had ever possessed!

We all remember how we felt when we first had a watch. Every one does much the same on that great occasion. One looks at it on both sides, touches each, opens it, holds it to one's ear. All this Frederick did, and thought how delightful it would be to take back his watch to school, to wind it up every evening! Fancy a watch at school! Watch-makers certainly don't live for nothing!

When Frederick had enjoyed his present to his heart's

content, and thanked his mother, the second prize was drawn out, and, if the truth must be told, Eugène had found the preliminaries rather long. This second prize was a good strong purse well filled with silver pieces. Eugène, wild with delight, set to work to count them, and made a mistake three times, so bewildering are the emotions of a capitalist. The lookers-on however could see more clearly, and it was announced that Eugène was the owner of twenty francs.

Everybody rejoiced with the children, and even their father roused himself from his melancholy mood. The party were chatting together in an easy, unconstrained manner, when old Rosette suddenly rushed into the dining-room in a state of excitement which made her forget all ceremony.

"Beg pardon, sir," she exclaimed, "but the postman has just been and left a letter for you. I found it on the side-board in the corner between the lamp and the cruet-stand. The man must have had a drop too much to leave it there, for it's a queer thing for a postman to do! The letter is a very funny shape too; perhaps it's from some one like me to give us news of the little one?"

M. de Valneige, much touched by the old nurse's agitation, took from her hands a badly folded letter, of coarse paper, on which a scarcely legible sentence, badly spelt, and still more badly expressed, was scrawled in a kind of reddish ink.

Madame de Valneige did not move; the guests anxiously awaited what was coming; whilst Rosette stood by with wide-open mouth,

At last M. de Valneige read aloud the following words in very bad French :

"Your little one is well. I am the daughter of the man who has him. If you give me your word of honour that you will not do my father any harm, I will let you see him again. Answer to the *poste restante*.

"M. XXX. At Nantua."

CHAPTER XV.

ADALBERT FINDS OUT WHY GELLA WROTE UPON THE GROUND.

ONE day when the gipsy party was encamped near Nantua, Gella was sent to do some commission in the town. She was accompanied by Moustapha, who was to help carry back the provisions she had to buy. The one pleasure of the poor boy's life was a walk with Gella, now so kind, and on the day in question she said to him as they were on their way back :

"Come, little one, let's take that winding path, from which you can't see the 'carriage.' We'll go and sit down somewhere. I have something to tell you."

"What can you have to say to me, dear Gella?"

"Oh, something very particular. But first you must promise me not to repeat a word of our talk."

"Ah, Gella, you needn't be afraid, why don't you trust me? Do you think I would do you any harm? Have you not noticed that I have not once tried to get away in the last six months, lest your father should get in a rage with you?"

"You are a good child, I know that. But listen, you can't go on living like this, it must be put a stop to. It grieves me too much to think that you have a father, a mother, a home, and that you might be so happy."

"Of course, I am very sorry too, but what can I do? I love you, you know, and but for my fear that you would be beaten—perhaps worse—I should soon be off again."

"Ah, well! all that will be arranged. Now I am going to tell you my secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes, a great secret. I have written to your father."

"To my father! Why?"

"To ask him something. You remember how I said to you one evening: do you really understand, little one, what a word of honour is?"

"Oh, yes, I remember. I told you that it was very wicked to give a word of honour and not to keep it, and how papa had scolded Frederick because he had given me his word of honour not to cheat at billiards, and had cheated all the same. Papa was very angry, and he said to my brother: 'It is easy to see that you do not know what a word of honour means. When an honest man gives his word he is bound by a most sacred obligation. If, when you are grown up, you ever break your word of honour I will not own you for my son. In future say Yes or No; that is all that is necessary.'"

"I remember all about it. And I thought, when you told me, the people at Valneige must be good, as they bring up their children so well. When they say Yes it means Yes, and when they say No it means No."

"Oh, yes! that is the way at home. No one tells stories there. But tell me. What can you have written to papa?"

Gella still hesitated a little, but at last she looked very kindly in the child's face, and answered gravely:

"I asked him to give his word of honour not to do my father any harm. He gave it to me, and then, in another letter, I told him what fairs we were going to, that he may try to watch you when you go round to collect coppers."

"Oh, Gella, have you really done all that?"

"Yes. You have quite touched my heart with all you have told me of your mamma, who goes about doing good, and of the church where your big sister received her first communion. Sometimes in the night I cried and said to myself, 'Wretch, can you let the innocent little fellow grow up surrounded by nothing but evil when you might save him with a word?'"

"How good you are! Oh, Gella, shall I really see my parents again?"

"Yes, little one, you will see them again."

"But you? How will you manage not to be killed? You said"

"Oh, I run no risk if you are taken back when you are not under my care. In a crowd, for instance, on an acting day. What I have done will make no difference to me, for I have confidence in you and in M. de Valneige's word. And you see my father is my father, after all. His ways are rough, it's true, and he doesn't make me happy; but if he loves any one in the world he loves me."

"Does he?" said Adalbert, opening his eyes in astonishment at the idea of this man loving anybody.

"You seem surprised, but I tell you four years ago I was ill, very ill, and he was quite distracted; why one day when he was sitting by my bed he actually cried."

"Are you saying that for fun?"

"No, it's quite true, and there are a good many men like him in the world. Bad they are, but they have a tender corner in their hearts somewhere. I said to myself: 'If I tell this gentleman where to find his boy he will have my father arrested, and he will be tried, condemned, and sent to prison all by himself, and I shall be the cause. The thought of it would kill me. He has often beaten me, certainly, but he fed me, and took care of me when I was a little thing, and then again, he is my father. But now that I have M. de Valneige's word of honour I am no longer afraid of anything.'"

"Oh, no, don't be afraid of anything. My father would not deceive you. Oh, I am so happy! I don't know what to say; I feel choked."

"Poor child, I have been able to do you good service then. You have done so much for me; but for you I should not know that there is a Heaven, no one else ever told me about it; I never heard any one but you speak of God."

"But now you know Him, Gella, you can serve Him."

"How can I serve Him here? But perhaps I am serving Him by separating myself from you for always. When you are happy you will forget me."

"Never!" replied the child, looking up in her face.

"I shall tell mamma about you, and she will love you too."

"Thank you, little one, thank you. Ah, when you are gone! Oh God, what shall I do! . . ."

As she spoke Gella gazed up into the sky, as if she were beginning to understand something of the things that are above, and Adalbert saw two large tears rolling down her cheeks. It was the first time he had ever seen her weep, and the emotion of one generally so strong and rough affected him deeply. The two were seated on a green bank in the midst of a wide and silent plain. The boy, thinking of his father, mother, brothers, and sister, was too much agitated to speak; and Gella, much as she had to say, could find no words to express her meaning, and alone with God and the little exile she for the first time whispered his own name, saying, like little Tilly, "Adalbert, Adalbert."

"Oh, how delightful! you have said my name."

"Dear child, you will soon hear your mother say it."

"Yes, I hope so."

"I have done all I can, your parents must do the rest."

"But how did you manage to write? I have seen neither pens nor ink in the 'carriage.'"

"Well, it wasn't easy, I can tell you; I began by carefully saving a bit of white paper in which a shop-woman had wrapped some red ribbon for my black velvet body; then I cut a point to a bit of stick to make a pen, but for ink I really didn't know what to do. Ink makes blots, and they would have betrayed me. I found a better

plan than to buy ink. I cut my finger a little and wrote with my blood."

"Poor Gella, that must have hurt you!"

"Oh, nothing to mind. I wrote as well as I could; all crooked of course. But your father managed to read it, because I got an answer from him yesterday."

"Oh, show me his letter! Let me just see his writing."

"You might have known I should burn it."

"Oh, yes, of course; how dreadful it would have been if they had found it. But how did papa manage to write your address."

"Well, I was dreadfully puzzled what to do. But you know my father sometimes goes to the post-office for letters, and sometimes these letters have only some signs agreed upon on them instead of his name. So I thought I would do the same, and I succeeded. Oh, what a work I had to get to Nantua to fetch the answer! But I did it at last. There's nothing to do now but to wait."

"When I get back to Valneige how obedient I will be!"

"You had better. Your parents never give you anything but good advice, and you ought to follow it; mind you tell your mamma that I always tried to make you do right; oh, don't let them think me a regular bad girl!"

"Don't be afraid."

As the time was getting on Gella now rose and hurried towards home. As she and her little companion neared the "carriage" they heard a violent dispute going on between Hercules and his son, for Karik, rather overdoing his imitation of his father, had told too many lies, and had carried his love of pilfering so far as to open the drawer

in which his father kept his money; the quarrel waxed hot, and as the coarse oaths and the sound of blows reached Adalbert's ears he felt a kind of despair come over him. The hopes he had been indulging, and the bright visions which had risen before his mind, had made his present lot appear more terrible than ever. Afraid of being drawn into the affray, he went and sat upon a rickety stool in a corner near the door, whilst Gella, who had become kind to everybody, managed to soothe her father, and to get old Praxède, who delighted to fan his wrath with taunts, out of the way.

When Hercules was not angry with Gella herself he often let her have power to keep or restore peace in the "carriage." The young girl was the one sunbeam which lit up the moral darkness of her home. Her father, it is true, was capable of any enormity when he was in a rage, but he did love her after a fashion of his own, and his "beautiful Andalusian," as he called her in his rare moments of good humour, was the good genius of his half savage nature.

CHAPTER XVI.

ADALBERT WAS THERE.

SPLENDID weather! No fear of rain. A beautiful spring day.

Blondine, a pretty little maiden of Alsace, between thirteen and fourteen years old, had finished her toilette, and put plenty of pommade on her hair, and was now

waiting in a great state of excitement, jingling her little fortune of thirteen sous in her pocket at the threshold of her home, for the arrival of her good friends Madame Tourtebonne and M. Baptist, who had promised to pick her up on the way to the fair at M——.

The time wore on, and the child began to be anxious lest anything should put a stop to the long-expected pleasure. Yet Madame Tourtebonne, in whose care her parents had placed her, was punctuality itself, so she must have been delayed by some unforeseen circumstance, over which she had no control.

This is what had happened. In the first place, you must know that Madame Tourtebonne thought a great deal of the fair at M——. For more than forty-five years she never remembered missing it once. She drove a thriving business all the year round, and the three days of the fair she gave herself up to amusement. She went determined to be pleased, and as a natural consequence found plenty to please her. She was one of those good-natured people who laugh just because others laugh, and are happy because others are happy.

Every year she arranged to go with several neighbours in one carriage, for the fair was held some ten miles off. This year she had found a capital means of transport, even M. Baptist's tilted cart. They were both well shaken up it is true, and old Manon, the horse, took every opportunity of stumbling, but at last they arrived. The good man, who did not care for amusement, generally went to the fair merely with a view to selling his herrings and cheese, hoping to meet some well-to-do farmers, with

whom he could strike a good bargain; but this year, alas! he was going because for the last three weeks he had had a most dreadful toothache, which kept him awake, and he had been assured that a certain dentist well known at the fair of M—— took out teeth *without pain*. These two words had a magic effect upon the country rustics, but M. Baptist, though he had gained no graces by his residence in a town, had certainly lost something of his early credulity, and could not therefore altogether believe all that was told him of the man's wonderful talent.

This half incredulity made him delay starting as long as he could, saying it was too early to put the horse to; that his watch was fast; that the horse ought to have something to eat; or that it was thirsty, and so on . . . Poor fellow, no wonder he dawdled, for whilst the others were going to amuse themselves he was going to the dentist's, and we all know that one is never in a great hurry to get there.

Poor Blondine, after waiting two hours, at last thought she heard the unequal trot of old Manon. In a moment she had kissed her grandmother, and was climbing into the cart, crying:

"Off at last! How delightful! I am so glad, what fun we will have!"

But suddenly catching sight of Baptist's face, she stopped her exclamations of delight, and could hardly help bursting out laughing. The toothache, so soon to be cured, had become absolutely unbearable, and was accompanied by such violent inflammation that the unfortunate victim had applied a quantity of wadding to

his right cheek, and covered it over with a great blue handkerchief tied at the top of his head like a bandage. Moreover he had tied a second red handkerchief round his head, over which he wore a white cotton night-cap with a silk handkerchief twisted about it like a turban, and to crown all he had from force of habit clapped on his great fur cap on top of the whole. The effect may be imagined!

Blondine could not get over it. She looked at her old friend Madame Tourtebonne, who had the greatest difficulty in keeping her own countenance in spite of her genuine sympathy for her poor companion's sufferings. As the slight blows of the whip which had to be given to Manon every two minutes compelled the patient to move, thereby adding to his sufferings, the good woman took the driving into her own hands, and urged on the stumbling horse with a continual "Gee up, Manon; come, Manon, go on!" accompanied by a perpetual slashing of the whip, all of which was absolutely necessary to get Manon—a peaceful brute not fond of change—to move at all.

Meanwhile his master could think of nothing but his toothache, which is indeed, as we all know, a most engrossing subject of contemplation.

Yet there have been philosophers who have denied the existence of pain! You may be quite sure, though, that they had good teeth, M. Baptist had a great deal too much sense to resemble them, and did not trouble himself to deny his pain. On the contrary, he bore witness to it every five minutes by crying out, "Oh! Ha!

Yah!" or some such expression, betraying only too decidedly the presence of the enemy. As he was naturally very taciturn, he said nothing beyond these exclamations, but what could be seen of his face told the rest. One cheek as pale as death, one half closed eye, one quivering nostril, one corner of a mouth drawn down with a piteous expression, were all that could be seen from amongst the bandages. No chance now of smoking the much-loved pipe, which with cheese and herrings formed the only joys of the poor man's peaceful existence. Life had nothing to offer now but shoots and throbs of pain! Alas, poor Baptist!

Blondine, in spite of her inclination to laugh, was a kind-hearted girl, and pitied M. Baptist very much; and as for Madame Tourtebonne, she would gladly have borne half the pain for the sake of giving her neighbour relief, and she told him so nine or ten times; but as that was impossible, he only gave her a slow nod of gratitude, and kept all his toothache to himself.

At last they were in the midst of the fair, and little Blondine opened her eyes to their fullest extent. She spent the greater part of her time in a large meadow, looking after her grandmother's cows, and her life, though very happy, was somewhat monotonous. Her delight at the life, the bustle, and above all the noise at the fair may therefore be imagined. Noise is the chief element at all popular fêtes, and here there was certainly no lack of it. Horses, cows, bulls, sheep, goats, pigs—neighed, bellowed, bleated, and grunted without a moment's pause. Dogs barked in every imaginable tone, and the cocks

kept up a perpetual cock-a-doodle-doo, as if trying to outdo the crowd, which shouted louder and louder at every crow. Oh, it really was delightful!

Here a quack offered to relieve everybody of corns, there a somnambulist with a bandage round his eyes professed to see more clearly than any one else. On the right wise-looking dogs performed wonderful tricks, on the left monkeys drew a crowd by their clever imitations of men; whilst here, there, and everywhere were refreshment-booths surrounded by customers, which any other day would have attracted M. Baptist, who knew that a glass of wine hurts nobody, but now, alas! "Ho! Yah! Ah!"

But amongst all these delights and all these noises one thing was never absent from Blondine's thoughts, and that was the loud summons to come and look from the various bands of tumblers or jugglers who frequented the fair. This year there were more than usual, and the pretty little maiden listened with unaffected delight to the resounding *boom! boom!* from the big drum, which meant: "Come, make haste, they are going to begin!"

It had, of course, been intended to get a front place, so as to see the games, dances, and gymnastics, without losing anything. Blondine had been looking forward to a great treat, but now she had to be content with what she could see as they went along, for in spite of all the attractions around, M. Baptist could still think of nothing but his toothache.

Madame Tourtebonne, as a sensible woman, said to him: "Now, my dear friend, if you take my advice, we will at once find the caravan painted red, with a drum

before it, trumpets behind it, and flags at each corner. When once the thing is done you won't think of it any more, and you may at least enjoy some of the fun. Am I not right?"

Poor man, how gladly he would have contradicted his neighbour, but, alas! she was only too much in the right! So he merely answered *hum*, as much as to say, "So be it then." But for all that he was in no hurry to see the horrid red caravan, which was visible enough to everybody who had not the toothache. If any one said to him, "Look, there it is!" he would immediately be anxious to get Blondine some cakes, or he would stop to look at a white rabbit, or to listen to some clever ventriloquist.

Blondine, however, was pitiless; she knew that there would be no enjoyment of the fair until the operation was over, so she thought of nothing but that, and eagerly sought for the caravan amongst the moving masses of people. Those who really seek find; and presently there was no avoiding seeing the red caravan surrounded by loiterers, most of them with swollen and bandaged faces, as if that were the proper costume for admission to the receptions held there.

The quarter of a cheek which M. Baptist had left visible became of a more ghastly hue than ever.

"Come, it must be done, neighbour Baptist, and besides, you know you are a man."

These words, spoken in a determined voice by Madame Tourtebonne, restored the patient's courage, and with all the eagerness of a man anxious to prove himself no



BITLING

M. BAPTIST SOON KNEW WHAT HIS TALENT WAS.

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coward, he pushed his way into the crowd near the caravan, and awaited his turn. Suddenly, however, the pain in the bad tooth ceased, and he had a good mind to go back as he had come, but he was too much compromised, and felt himself bound in honour to go through with it.

Although the quack never ceased to declare emphatically that he took out teeth without pain, no one left his hands without distorted features, eyes full of tears, and murmurs of discontent. It was evident that everybody felt pain, but for all that the operation would have been painless but for some error on the part of the victim. One had moved his head, another his foot, one was not well prepared, another had been stupid enough to eat something a quarter of an hour beforehand. Whilst others had long had sore gums, others decayed teeth, and so on; which explanations were never accepted by the last customer, but always left a shade of hope to the next comer.

At last M. Baptist ascended the caravan, and there was a moment of silence. The celebrated operator—dressed like a prince from some unknown land, with a plumed cap, muffled sleeves, and so on—this time wasted no time in idle words, but with a dignified air set to work to tug with all his might at the luckless tooth, so that M. Baptist soon knew what his talent really was. The poor man went through all the usual experiences of such a moment, unable to utter a word, yet feeling that his tooth was going, because there was no help for it, and that his head was going with it.

The drum and trumpets meanwhile announced by a simultaneous burst of sound that M. Baptist was the happiest of mortals, and his piercing scream was drowned by their discordant music, all that was heard being a rataplan, rataplan, followed by a flourish of trumpets, and above it all the shrill notes of a barrel-organ, which had been playing the *Galop de Gustave* ever since the early morning. M. Baptist paid his fee and had to hurry down, so overwhelmed with custom was the great operator.

The tooth was gone, there was no doubt of that; but as for its having gone without pain, that was all nonsense. M. Baptist, inclined to make allowances, concluded that he must have moved without knowing it, and turned away with the look of a man greatly impressed, and uttering not a word of complaint or comment.

What with the excitement, the shock, and the *Galop de Gustave*, however, he was quite giddy, and Madame Tourtebonne, like a prudent woman, made him sit down.

Blondine, who was after all only fourteen years old, was quite astonished. She had really thought that when the thing was once out the good man would pass at once to a state of ecstasy, and that he would take off all his bandages and wrapping. No such thing! M. Baptist proceeded to add to them his pocket-handkerchief, which he perseveringly held to his mouth, declaring he had a wretched head-ache into the bargain now.

What a disappointment! At first Blondine thought they might as well get into the cart again, as everything was going wrong; but the worthy cheesemonger, taking refuge in a little temporary restaurant beneath a tent, and

resigning himself to his fate, urged his companions to act as if he were not there, at which Blondine was vastly delighted; but Madame Tourtebonne determined not to go farther than a stone's throw, and to come back every now and then to ask her poor friend how he was, promising, moreover, to go back in the middle of the day if the pain became unbearable.

Blondine was obliged to be content with this arrangement, and it took her and her escort about an hour to go over some two hundred yards, so many things were there to admire.

But in all her delight the child kept saying, "Ah, but what I want to see are the tumblers; I want to see them more than anything."

"So do I, dear child."

"Ah, I know why; you are thinking of your little boy."

"So I am. I have been thinking of nothing but him since the morning, and last night I dreamt of him, poor little darling."

"Do you think you would know him again?"

"Oh yes, I should know him if I saw him close. A fair little chap, with the air of a prince, whose name is Adalbert. Poor child, I wonder if he has a mother. It's really terrible! If I had had any children, and such a misfortune had happened to me, I should have gone out of my mind."

And to Blondine's great astonishment Madame Tourtebonne began to sigh for the children she had never had.

The conversation having once turned upon Adalbert, was not likely to flag, and both kept on saying,

“Perhaps he is here! Who can tell?”

Suddenly in the crowd they recognised their good friends Julian and his wife, who had been sent to the fair by their kind master and mistress that they might amuse themselves a little. This meeting was most opportune; they determined to keep together, and M. Baptist, relieved that the ladies had found another escort, was only too glad to beat a retreat. Julian had a conveyance in which the four could return home, and so they set to work to enjoy themselves quietly, whilst M. Baptist went off, intending in a cosy nap to forget the man who had given him so much suffering in taking out his tooth without pain.

Those whom he left behind enjoyed themselves immensely. Blondine spent her fifteen sous: she bought some cakes, and politely offered them to the rest of the party, drank two cups of cocoa, won an egg-cup in a lottery, gave a sou to a blind man, and, like a kind-hearted little soul as she was, kept two to be generous with when the acting so much looked forward to actually began.

The time arrived at last, and on every side feats of skill, dances, and pantomimes were to be seen. Blondine skipped about with delight, but all the time one thought haunted her. In every little tumbler she hoped to find Adalbert. Madame Tourtebonne and Sophie were both thinking quite as much of the “child of the cellar,” as they called him, but the young peasant girl, with the enthusiasm of her age, felt absolutely certain that he must be there; so we see all four were possessed with the same idea. Sophie would have given something to take back the child to the dear

mistress who had grieved so much over his fate. Madame Tourtebonne pictured to herself the delight of the mother on recovering her long-lost child; Blondine longed earnestly for an excitement, an adventure, which would not only have been very nice for the people immediately concerned, but very amusing for her; whilst the grave and silent Julian, a zealous advocate of justice, had but one wish, and that was to point out the infamous gang to the police, and have the ringleaders sent to prison for their offence, and in this he shared the sentiments of his master.

Animated by motives so different, the four passed several hours in wandering about the fair; the weather was still beautiful, but certain gloomy-minded wiseacres kept saying,

“We shall have rain!”

Blondine thought it was a great shame to say that, but one comfort was that nobody took any notice.

The day was now wearing on, and people began to talk of going home. It was of no use for Blondine to sigh, they must go back to the town, and in order to do that they must find their carriage. Great black clouds were gathering overhead, and some ill-natured folks already felt drops of rain. When they were some fifty yards from the “carriage,” however, Julian exclaimed:

“Oh, there is the beautiful Andalusian! She is worth looking at. Ten minutes more or less won’t make all the difference before we start for home.”

Blondine quite agreed with Julian, and he added, “Look, how beautiful she is!”

“And she dances very nicely too, with the artificial

flowers in her hair," remarked Madame Tourtebonne, quite struck with her easy grace. "Dear me, if I had to throw myself about like that I should tumble down, that I should."

Everybody was wild with delight, for Gella really looked splendid, and was greeted with shouts of "Encore! Encore!" The poor girl bowed to the audience, danced, bowed again, and then, as she was retiring quite exhausted, a little fellow dressed like a rope-dancer made his way into the crowd with a wooden bowl in his hand. His appearance was the signal for departure, everybody moved away with an absent air, anxious to retain his neighbour's "good opinion" without parting with his money. The dense crowd melted away as if by magic. The dance was over, Gella had disappeared, it was getting dark, and it was beginning to rain fast; everybody was out of humour, and a general disorder prevailed. People pushed and drove against each other; the fortunate possessors of umbrellas put them up, whilst their poorer brethren spread their pocket-handkerchiefs over their heads, and through it all the fair-haired little tumbler persevered in collecting his paltry pence. At last he approached Blondine, who had been watching him for a long time, and the young girl, full of her one idea, took him quietly by the arm and said to him in a peremptory voice:

"You were stolen, weren't you? and your name is Adalbert?"

The child did not seem in the least astonished, but looking into Blondine's face with an expression of perfect confidence, he answered "Yes!"

"I know you ! I know you !" cried Madame Tourtebonne, holding out her arms, and the little fellow threw himself into them without a moment's hesitation, as if he knew how good and kind she was. Meanwhile the rain poured down in torrents, the tumult was at its height, and the child was carried off in the direction of the main road without attracting more than passing notice. He was already stepping into the carriage, when Julian said to the two women :

"Go on without me. I shall go and speak to the police ; the matter must not end here."

"Never mind the police, but come with us. We've got the little one, and what more would you have ?"

"Nonsense, nonsense ! We don't keep up prisons for nothing."

And Julian disappeared. At this moment a beautiful woman in a peasant's dress, pale and trembling with emotion, rushed towards the carriage, and cried in a heart-rending voice :

"Is it you ?"

At this Sophie, alarmed for Adalbert's safety, flung her shawl over his head, and Madame Tourtebonne said to the conductor, "Let us be off ! let us be off !"

The horse was urged into a trot, and the poor woman who had spoken, after leaning for a moment against a tree, fell to the ground in a fainting fit.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADALBERT SEES THE CELLAR AGAIN.

MADAME DESCHAMPS' delight when the little boy was brought to her in triumph can easily be imagined. She treated him as one of her own grandchildren, and overwhelmed him with caresses, showing such a tender interest in him that Adalbert, who well remembered the little white house, soon felt quite at his ease with her, and great was his joy at being able to run about unmolested in a clean, pretty, and above all stationary home, after having been so long surrounded by dirt and coarseness.

When Blondine and her good-natured escort at last took leave it was with a promise to come and see him soon, and Adalbert, who naturally felt warm gratitude to them both, looked forward to improving their acquaintance.

M. Deschamps, a practical man, was at first a little incredulous, and disposed to damp the enthusiasm of the others, but it was impossible to retain a doubt after he had heard Adalbert's simple answers to the most skilfully propounded questions.

Sophie wanted to take him at once to the cellar, but her master would not permit it until he had questioned him himself; Adalbert spoke of the coal with which he had written his name and that of each member of his family, and the yellow ribbon he had thrown upon the ground; he was able to tell all that he had seen in the cellar, to

point out the place occupied by the empty bottles and by the planks. He also alluded to the black-beetles, to the rat which had pierced a hole in the door, and it was noticed that he shuddered when he again heard the clock strike, the sound of which he remembered but too well.

When Sophie, accompanied by her master and mistress, at last took him down into the cellar, he looked about him with an expression of great sadness, gazing long and fixedly at the hole through which he had entered the first time. Then he related the history of the star, and told how Gella had saved him.

All this took a good half hour, and M. Deschamps, who had made Adalbert give him his parents' address, next proceeded to write to them, that his letter might be posted the first thing the next morning. Meanwhile Madame Deschamps remembered that her little protégé might be hungry ; but fortunately for him Blondine had fed him with cakes, nuts, and apples all the way from the fair.

As Julian had not yet returned from his search for the criminals, and Sophie was wet to the skin and had to change everything, Madame Deschamps set to work to get some supper for Adalbert herself. She had plenty of cold meat, fruit, and jam in her larder, but with true maternal instinct she thought some nice hot soup and a new-laid egg would be more likely to do him good, and he could follow them up with a slice of cold veal, or anything else he fancied, if he liked. She gloated over the preparation of her soup and boiling the water for the egg, and every two or three minutes she could not refrain from looking into the dining-room and saying,

“Oh, dear child! how happy your mother will be!”

Adalbert took the soup and the egg, but he could not manage anything more. What pleased him above everything was the little dinner-service, his white napkin, his pretty knife, and silver cover. He had lived so long amongst poor and miserable people that all these things were delightful to him; he was ready to answer fully all the questions that were put to him, and was never tired of telling of all they did at Valneige. As he talked the “carriage” faded from his thoughts like a bad dream, and he felt as if he had known the owners of the White House for ever so long. Sometimes, however, he would sigh and say :

“Oh, Gella! poor good Gella!”

“You really loved that poor girl then?” inquired M. Deschamps.

“How could I help loving her? She was so good, so good!”

Adalbert's eyes would fill with tears at the remembrance of Gella, of whom he thought as of a flower left among weeds and brambles. He thought sadly too of good little Tilly, and even of Natchès, who, though stupid, was so submissive and inoffensive.

But in spite of his full confidence in his new friends, the little fellow did not say all that he thought. He took care not to talk much about Gella, as he was always afraid of doing her injustice, and indirectly betraying her secret. He remembered that none of those about him knew his family; that he owed his liberty to the kindness of those whom God had thrown in his path; and that everything

had happened quite independently of what Gella had done, although she would naturally suppose him to owe his liberty to her efforts on his behalf.

It was now getting late, and Madame Deschamps, anxious that her little friend should rest, prepared with her own hands the little bed with white curtains in her own room, which was always given to any of the grandchildren who came from time to time to brighten up the White House.

Before going to bed Adalbert asked M. Deschamps to let him write a line at the bottom of the letter which was to be sent to his father.

"I'll write him a long letter to-morrow," he said; "but I should like him to see my writing again as soon as possible."

This idea was applauded as it deserved, and the child, who had not held a pen for two years, wrote the following words in a crooked hand:

"MY DEAR PARENTS,—

"It is I. I love you with all my heart.

"Your son ADALBERT."

Directly afterwards he went up into Madame Deschamps' room. The good woman had purposely put the yellow ribbon found in the cellar in a conspicuous place, to see if he would recognise it. Adalbert saw it at once, and looking at it with invincible repugnance, he seized it and flung it to the other end of the room, at which his kind hostess embraced and kissed him, eager to atone for the pain she had given him.

The little fellow then knelt down and said the prayers he had never forgotten, looking up at an ivory crucifix which reminded him of one in his mother's room at Valneige. Once in bed he was soon asleep, and he actually never woke until eleven o'clock the next morning! Every one took care not to disturb his rest after such an exciting day. Madame Deschamps would not even draw up the blinds, but crept out of her own room into that of her husband, where she found Julian, who had come back in the middle of the night.

The sound of the eager voices asking and answering questions at last woke the sleeper, and without listening he had the mortification of overhearing part of the conversation.

Julian in a cold, stern voice was talking of police, fugitives, pursuit, the indignation of the crowd, the curses hurled by all the mothers at the chief of the gang; and at last he went on to speak of what Adalbert could understand, telling how an old woman, the Andalusian, and two young children had been arrested, and were now in prison; that the chief and his son had got off, but that orders to pursue them had been given, and that there was every hope of capturing them sooner or later.

On hearing this Adalbert burst into tears, and his sobs redoubled when Julian added with indifference that the Andalusian, in trying to aid her father's escape, had trusted herself on some insecure planks, that they had given way, and she had fallen and hurt herself.

Adalbert, who had a keen sense of honour, was more troubled about Gella than anything else, and he said to himself:

“Poor girl, she trusted to papa’s word of honour, and now that she is in prison and her father a fugitive, she will think that we have deceived her: that I am ungrateful, and that papa does not keep his word. Oh what a pity! what a pity!”

When Madame Deschamps saw Adalbert’s distress she could hardly understand it, although she did all she could to comfort him.

Madame Deschamps interfered, and assured the child very seriously several times that as the young girl was under her father’s control, and had moreover done all she could to alleviate the prisoner’s lot, she would not be hardly dealt with, but would doubtless be set at liberty as soon as the head of the gang had been brought to justice, adding that “As for that wretch, no one need care what was done to him.”

These words but half relieved Adalbert’s anxiety, and no one about him knew the real reason for his interest in the man who had torn him from all his friends. Julian thought and said straight out that he must have something wrong with his head.

It was quite another matter in the afternoon when Madame Tourtebonne, truck and all, came to make inquiries after the “hero of the cellar.” He looked so different in his nice clothes with which Madame Deschamps had provided him, that she hardly knew him again. As soon as she heard that her protégé was in low spirits about his late companions, the good woman exclaimed,

“But, my dear little gentleman, do you mean to tell me

that you would not be very glad to know that the rogue was condemned to the galleys for life?"

"Oh, no!"

"But just listen. You may feel kindly towards the girl, because she has been good to you, and to the old woman, because her days are numbered, but as for that monster—why, if I were in the government instead of only an applewoman, I'd have the heads of all children stealers cut off."

This speech made Adalbert shudder, but he consoled himself with thinking that she was only an applewoman after all.

As a distraction from his unexpected depression Madame Deschamps took Adalbert into the garden, and the sight of the pond suggested to her that he might enjoy a little fishing. She called her husband, and he lent his best line to his little guest, took the greatest pains to teach him all the delicate manœuvres of the craft, and actually, by an unheard-of chance, his efforts were crowned by great success. Each little foolish fish which allowed itself to be caught was such a delight to Adalbert, that he soon forgot all his troubles, the headache of which he had complained disappeared, and when he went into the house again he asked for pen, ink, and paper to write the following letter:

"MY DEAR PAPA AND MAMMA,—

"I scarcely know how to write any more, but I must just tell you that I love you more than anything in the world, and that I am longing very much to see you

and my brothers and sister, and to kiss you all again. I have so many things to tell you that it is no use to begin now, for I should never finish. Oh, what a long time it is since I saw you! I am staying with a very good gentleman and a very good lady, and I sleep in the lady's own room. She has given me a nice suit of clothes, like other people wear. Her husband taught me to fish, and I caught five fishes; they are going to be fried. Oh how nice it will be to kiss you again! What a pity I was disobedient! Everything which has happened to me was my own fault, I deserve to be punished; but if you knew how unhappy I have been! Gella was very good, I love her very much. Dear Papa, don't let them do her any harm, and don't let her father be put in prison. She has got a bad foot. There are some people here who want to have her father condemned. Oh, do come quickly, please, do, because of what you know, which I mustn't say, because it is a secret, and I am afraid to trust secrets through the post. The lady and gentleman here knew that I tumbled into their cellar nearly six months ago. I shall tell you everything, but I know it will make dear Mamma cry. Some things are very funny. There are some people who loved me although they did not know me. One is a little girl who took me by the arm and called me by my name, when I was going round with my wooden bowl. I thought you had sent her, so I came with her at once, it was raining, I was quite confused. They dragged me to the carriage. There was a woman who called out "Is it you?"

"Her voice sounded like yours, mother dear, but it was a peasant woman. But now at last I am saved; but

not at all as I expected to be. I suppose the good God arranged it all, as He arranges everything. Oh, how I love Him!

“Good bye, dear Papa and Mamma, I am very comfortable here, but I am longing to start for home. I send my very, very best love to Camilla, Eugène, and Frederick. Oh, how happy we shall all be! I send my love to Rosette too, I haven’t forgotten her. I love everybody at Val-neige—tell Philip, Gervais, and all of them I say so.

“Oh, how glad I shall be to see you all again! But try and not let them put that horrid man in prison, so that Gella may not be made miserable by me.

“Your little ADALBERT.”

M. Deschamps closed and sealed the little fellow’s letter in his presence without reading it, and then sent Julian to the post with it.

In going through the little town the latter met Madame Tourtebonne, who was always about in the streets. The good woman of course began to talk about Adalbert, and when Julian expressed a hope that justice would soon have its course, she agreed with him, and said how anxious she was for the time to arrive when she and Baptist should be called as witnesses, when she would at last be able to tell the judges all she knew.

The worst of it was that M. Baptist had inflammation of the face, which so completely occupied his thoughts that he had scarcely spirit enough to bring out so much as his favourite *hum*. The very idea of appearing at a trial made him pull his bandage further over his face, so that it

seemed likely to disappear almost as entirely as it had done the day before. Always fond of peace and quietude, the poor man became absolutely dumb under the influence of this unfortunate inflammation, and when his old friend kept on urging him to action, he at last by a supreme effort brought out the words:

"The little one is found again, and that is all that is necessary."

"No, it isn't; no, it isn't," replied Madame Tourtebonne as she wheeled away her truck.

Meanwhile another scene was taking place elsewhere; Gella in her prison was wringing her hands in despair. She had done nothing but good to her little companion: she had aided his escape, trusting to a promise of secrecy, and now she thought herself ruined by the child she had loved so much, and in her surprise and grief she exclaimed:

"What had I done that you should deceive me so? Ah, that is not what you taught me yourself! Did you not tell me that God wished us to render good for evil?—and all of you people at Valneige are rendering me evil for good. Your father gave me his word of honour in writing. I ought not to have believed in it, but I believed in it because you told me they never told lies at your home; and you have told a lie yourself, you have deceived me. My father will be convicted, and I shall be the cause. I shall die of grief, and you will have killed me! yes, you, Adalbert!"

Poor Gella! She firmly believed that the little French boy had been rescued in consequence of the information

she had given ; and alone in prison, with a wounded foot, and misfortunes of every kind menacing her, it was no wonder that her heart gave way.

But she was not the only sufferer on the evening of Adalbert's escape ; some country people hastening away from the fair through the rain and confusion saw a peasant woman lying insensible at the foot of a tree. She was tall and pale, and her white hands contrasted strangely with the rustic simplicity of her costume. A man who was certainly neither her husband nor her brother was doing all he could to bring her to herself. He was not speaking to her in the rough and ready style of his class, but as if he felt the greatest respect for her : who then could this woman have been ?

CHAPTER XVIII.

ADALBERT WAS NOT UNGRATEFUL.

MANY changes took place in the course of the next ten days. Old Praxède, whose life had long seemed to hang on a thread, had succumbed to the shock, and her death had caused no very great lamentation. Natchès and Tilly, whose misfortunes had been related by Adalbert, were received provisionally by the kind-hearted inmates of the White House. Tilly coughed incessantly, and every one manifested the tenderest compassion for her sufferings.

The active though secret steps which were being taken for the capture of Hercules had been suddenly discontinued, and good Gella, now removed from the prison to the hospital, was lying in a nice white bed surrounded by all the comforts her condition required. Her mind was again at ease, for she now knew that the prisoner's deliverance had been effected by providential means; the chain of events which had led to Adalbert's liberty had been related to her, and, reassured as to the future, she no longer thought, "They have deceived me."

But what was going on at Valneige? Had not Adalbert's father hurried to fetch his boy on the receipt of M. Deschamps' letter? No.

Had not his mother at least written to express her gratitude? No. A reply had, however, been received from Valneige, but it was from Camilla, and in the following terms:

"SIR,—

"I write to you on behalf of my father, who has been ill for the last month, and is reduced to great weakness by fever. Your letter will doubtless restore him to health, for his illness was caused by grief for the loss of my little brother. My mother would have set out immediately on receipt of your letter if she had been here, but business of a very important nature has compelled her to leave my father and undertake a long journey attended by one of our servants. I wrote to her this morning, and I put your letter, which will tell her everything, inside mine. Poor mother, how happy she will be after all her troubles. She will be with you

in a few days, and you may congratulate yourself on having overwhelmed her with happiness, restored my father to life, and given a whole family cause for rejoicing.

“My father wishes me to tell you, sir, that my little brother spoke in his letter to him of a poor girl called Gella, who has been arrested, and who was always very good to him. We all wish that she should not suffer at all, because she has not only done no harm, but did much to alleviate the lot of my brother. My father, hearing that she is ill, would like her to be taken to the hospital. A magistrate, a friend of ours who lives close to us, has written to-day to the authorities at my father’s request, to ask them not to take any further steps in the matter relating to Gella.

“May I beg of you, sir, to express to Madame Deschamps all we should like to say ourselves, and to thank her for the motherly kindness which has made our dear little Adalbert forget all he has suffered amongst the gipsies.

“With respectful compliments,

“I am, sir,

“Yours truly,

“CAMILLA DE VALNEIGE.”

In the same envelope was a sealed note, addressed to Adalbert:

“MY DEAR LITTLE DARLING,

“I love you! I love you! Mamma set off a week ago in a peasant’s costume, accompanied by our faithful

Gervais. She meant to go to all the fairs mentioned by . . . She was certainly there the day before yesterday, but at a distance, and in the confusion perhaps she did not see you; or perhaps she did not know you.

"Papa is very ill; but he has been better since yesterday. Oh, I wish you could have seen him! He asked me twenty times for the letter from M. Deschamps, in which you had written a line and signed your name. He kept on reading over that line, and shed tears over it just as mamma would have done if she had been here.

"Don't worry yourself. No one will suffer at all, and we will try and do all we can for the good girl.

"I send you twenty, forty kisses. I am going to write to Eugène and Frederick, who are at school. Our old Rosette is mad with joy, everybody loves you, and longs to see you! Ah, how delightful it will be when you are here amongst us all in our own Valneige.

"Your sister

"CAMILLA."

Adalbert was very much happier after reading this letter; but he took care not to show it to any one. It wouldn't do for people to know that his mother, disguised as a peasant woman, was hunting for him at fairs, in obedience to the directions of some one. That would have been to betray Gella's secret, and to break that word of honour which had been asked and given. A word of honour cannot be broken without dishonour. In this the good little fellow gave proof of great prudence, and the people about him supposed that the Valneige family had forgiven everything for the sake of Gella,

who had been so kind to Adalbert, and was so much to be pitied for being a robber's daughter.

As will readily be imagined, this generosity, the real reason for which was unknown, caused some surprise. Madame Tourtebonne was almost angry. M. Deschamps declared he would not have been so lenient as all that, but, whilst protecting Gella as she so well deserved, he would have had her father followed up to the frontiers, and, Julian added, to the end of the world.

Madame Deschamps accepted things as they were, and gave herself up to amusing the child, brushing the beautiful hair of which his mother had been so proud, and preparing nice little dishes for him, good thick soup, cutlets, and everything she could think of that was nourishing. She often had a chat with him, and made him read pretty little stories aloud, the simple words of which conveyed many a useful moral. In a word, she was a mother, and treated him as if he had been a child of her own.

As for Sophie, she was possessed with one idea. The "child of the cellar" was thin and pale, she wanted to make him fat and rosy; and feeling sure that good cooking is the best of doctors, she invented all kinds of little tit-bits for Adalbert, in the hopes of tempting him to eat plenty and get fat quickly. As she had but four or five days in which to accomplish her task, she did all she could to hurry it forward, spicing her sauces to give him an appetite, and offering him dainty luncheons between every meal.

Adalbert, who had so long been half starved, was by

no means insensible to the temptation, and yielding to Sophie's solicitations, he kept on eating pretty well all day—glad to forget the hard fare of the caravan. But presently he recollected the good rule at Valneige. A well-behaved child, he had been told some hundred times, ought not to eat between his meals, it is greedy to do so, and greediness is vulgar. So the third day Adalbert told Sophie that he was very much obliged to her for all the trouble she took for him, but that now he had had so much good food he had quite forgotten old Praxède's soup, and was determined not to eat more than four meals a day, as he did at home with his mamma.

“But your mamma is not here now.”

“That doesn't matter. If I eat between meals I shall be disobeying her, and I will never, never disobey my parents again.”

Sophie could not but own that the dear child was in the right, and left off urging him. But she saw with real delight that he already began to look better, his eyes were brighter, and his colour was returning. Happiness and liberty, of course, had a great deal to do with the improvement, but Sophie attributed it all to her sauces, and so everybody was pleased.

Adalbert had been under this hospitable roof for a week, when one day a lady of dignified and distinguished appearance knocked at the door of the White House, accompanied by her servant. Julian opened the door, but before he had time to speak to her she rushed towards the child, who was playing in the yard with Tom, and folded him closely in her motherly arms. Every one hurried to

welcome her, and there was scarcely a dry eye. Even M. Deschamps was quite upset, and Julian whispered to Gervais, who was weeping for joy:

“I’m really all of a tremble. This is more affecting than the cannon of Sebastopol!”

After the first few moments of excitement the party repaired to the drawing-room, and with fine tact Madame Deschamps said to her husband, “Let us leave them alone together!”

The door was closed, and mother and son were alone.

Only then did Madame de Valneige understand the full extent of her happiness. She did not speak, but gazed at her boy with all her soul in her eyes. She seemed, poor woman, to be resuming once more the possession of the child whom God Himself had given her. She took his hands and pressed them between her own, whilst the hot tears rolled down her cheeks. Her son was there, and he loved her!

And now once more life was bright and full of hope. Madame de Valneige, forgetting all her troubles, felt as if she could never be unhappy again. It was Adalbert’s loss which had made her husband ill, and his restoration would be the cause of his recovery. Oh, how delightful it all was! She was still struggling with her joyful agitation when the door opened, and Sophie came in to ask if Madame de Valneige would not like a nice little omelette made with a couple of eggs laid but an hour ago? Or some biscuits, some sweet wine, or anything else? For Sophie’s one dread was that the people about her should become faint for want of food in all the

excitement they were undergoing. Madame de Valneige, as may be supposed, had not the slightest inclination to eat an omelette; she declined in the most courteous manner, and Sophie's entrance having broken in upon her maternal raptures, she asked where Madame Deschamps was?

The lady in question was then just coming down from her room, and Sophie retired to console herself for the mistake she had made by offering a glass of wine to the faithful Gervais. In this she did but anticipate the wishes of her mistress, who never received any one without offering the bread and wine of hospitality in the good old-fashioned style. But on the other hand, she was too well bred and had too much taste to propose an omelette or anything else in the midst of a scene so touching as that between her guest and her recovered child.

It is needless to relate in detail all that passed between the two mothers. In spite of the difference of rank they recognised each other as kindred spirits, and Madame Deschamps, looking upon Madame de Valneige merely as the mother of Adalbert, felt at once entirely at her ease with her, whilst Adalbert, himself was treated with all the tenderness and consideration a child of his age required.

When M. Deschamps joined the party the conversation became rather more practical. Hitherto Madame de Valneige had thought only of the present: she was now to hear all about the past and to discuss the future. She was told of all those who had aided in the recovery of her boy, of Madame Tourtebonne, Blondine, and the others. Everything was repeated over and over again, and still

the mother was not satisfied. How many tears she shed at the relation of the twenty-four hours passed in the cellar! She insisted on going down to see the place which was so nearly the grave of her child, and she read the words upon the wall with a visible shudder. In the evening she expressed a strong desire to go down again, and then, alone in the cellar with her little Adalbert, she placed herself in such a position that she could see the beautiful star which had so comforted the lonely child, and to which he had given the name of Adeline.

"Mamma, dear mamma," said the little boy as he kissed his mother, "we must find out exactly where it is in the sky, that papa may know it and love it too."

"Yes, my boy," replied Madame de Valneige gravely; "your father will love it. Neither he nor I will ever forget anything that was a comfort to [you or did you good."

And as his mother looked at him with her loving eyes, Adalbert crept close to her and whispered in a trembling voice,

"Is papa no longer at all angry with me?"

"Angry about what?"

"About my being disobedient? Will he forgive me?"

"My poor child, who could help forgiving you? Have you not been punished enough? Your father only wants to see you to get quite well again. He loves you, and there's an end of the matter."

Then Adalbert threw himself into his mother's arms, and the spirit of opposition completely broken by all he had gone through, he exclaimed,

"I promise you that I will never, never again be disobedient!"

Long did the mother and child, forgetful of all but each other, remain in the cellar, each hesitating to be the first to destroy the bliss of the moment by saying, "Let us go." The silence and the darkness seemed to isolate them from the rest of the world, but at last Adalbert ventured to stammer out in a whisper, as if even the cellar was not sufficiently private for the revelation of his secret,

"And Gella, mamma? Gella, who meant to save me?"

"I will go and see her at the hospital to-morrow."

"Oh, that will be nice!"

But time was drawing on, and they were early people at the White House. The clock acted as a curfew-bell, and as it struck nine Madame de Valneige shuddered at the thought of Adalbert's misery when he heard it for the first time.

As the last stroke died away the two went upstairs again, and very soon afterwards the whole party retired to rest.

The stranger was conducted by her hostess into the visitor's room, which though small, was beautifully clean and neat. In one corner Madame de Valneige noticed a little curtained bed, and fully appreciated the kind thought which had dictated its removal into her room. Madame Deschamps had felt that she would like to have her boy with her.

The next day Madame de Valneige, not without excit-

ing some little surprise, inquired her way to the hospital, saying that she wished to see the good girl who had been such a comfort to Adalbert. The road was pointed out to her, and she set off accompanied by Adalbert only.

When Gella saw her come in the poor girl felt overwhelmed at the thought of her own wretched condition and her father's crime. The colour rushed into her beautiful face, framed with black dishevelled locks, and her whole manner betrayed her confusion.

The child, quite at his ease, rushed up to her and embraced her as the only friend he had had in his weary exile, and the great lady took both her hands in her own as if to reassure her, and sitting down by the bed, she talked to her for a long time in a very low voice, to which the young girl replied in such a whisper, so broken by sobs, that Adalbert could hardly make out these last words,

“No, madam, no, I am not worthy of so much goodness! To work at Valneige! To have food and clothing, to live under your roof and see Master Adalbert every day! Oh, it would be too much honour for me! My father has no one in the world but me to nurse him when he is ill, and to earn money for him when he cannot earn it for himself. He is getting old, my brother will not stay with him, for he has only done so because he was obliged. There is no one but me. Leave me to my misery, madam. I will work, not as I used to do, for the doctor says I shall be a cripple, but I am used to sewing, and I am not wanting in courage. I shall go and join my father, I know where to find him. He has behaved very

badly to you, to everybody, even to me, I know, but then, after all, he is my father!"

Madame de Valneige listened in astonishment, and said to herself, "We should beware how we condemn any one. There are noble souls to be met with everywhere."

Adalbert's mother then went on to say much that the child himself could not have done, telling Gella about God and Heaven. In the next few weeks, whilst Gella was compelled to remain in absolute retirement, everything seemed to be possible; the chaplain would instruct her, and her white bed would be to her the cradle of a new existence; she would receive her first communion, and learn to know something of that God of whom Adalbert had said, "He knows everybody's name and everybody's face."

Oh, how more than rewarded she would then feel for all her efforts on Adalbert's account, and how happy she felt already when Madame de Valneige, laying her hand upon the invalid's burning brow, said to her:

"Be a guardian angel to your father then, and rest assured that I will always be your protector. Wherever you may be, my dear girl, remember me, and in whatever troubles that may come upon you turn to me. I love you, and I bless you for all you have done!"

Gella followed the mother and child with her eyes as they left the room, and when Adalbert turned round to give her one last look, she said, her heart overflowing with gratitude,

"Thank you for all the good you have done me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ADALBERT IS OBEDIENT.

NEVER was there a happier meal. There were fifteen at table. Every one was in the brightest spirits, laughing, joking, and enjoying everything. Eugène and Frederick had come to pass two days at Valneige, having obtained a holiday as a great favour on account of the happy event which had restored peace, gladness, and health to their home. Old Rosette said her dear little fair-haired boy had always carried all these good things in his pockets, and that he had but to appear to drive away sorrow and weariness.

In fact M. de Valneige had quite lost his fever, and was no longer troubled with sleeplessness; he was pale and weak still, but his boy's presence seemed to be gradually restoring his powers. He was advised to travel, and preparations for starting were already being made. Meanwhile the elders and the young people were enjoying themselves together, and all was mirth and happiness.

Christian and his brothers remembered the dinner at which Adalbert would have been the fourteenth, and compared the present rejoicing with the anxiety which then oppressed every one.

Yes, Adalbert would then have been the fourteenth, but now there were fifteen at table. Beside Camilla sat a

pretty, delicate-looking child, whose hacking cough and sad but sweet expression said as plainly as if she had spoken :

“Perhaps it is death coming, and after death, heaven.”

You will have recognised Tilly, Adalbert's little friend. Gella had confessed to Madame de Valneige out of affection to her what she never would have owned in a court of justice—Tilly was really a stolen child, who had been stolen when quite a baby from a public garden. Nothing was known of her parents, they had lost her for ever in this world; but her life could not last long, as her delicate chest had had none of the care it so much needed. The doctors consulted had said that the end could not be far off, and Monsieur and Madame de Valneige had replied, “No more loneliness, no more suffering, no more cold!”

Peace, loving faces round her, and all the consolations of Christianity were what the little invalid now received in return for her compassionate affection for her brother in misfortune, to whom she had said the first day of his captivity :

“Will you have my soup? It doesn't hurt me not to have enough to eat.”

As for Natchès, who was stolen as well as Tilly, everything about him, both appearance and character, testified to the low origin which Gella ascribed to him. He remained with M. Deschamps, and was never so happy as when he was in the kitchen, going into positive ecstasies over a beefsteak or a white sauce. His stupidity often made those about him laugh, but he was able to do a good deal of purely menial work pretty well. His docility

made him perfectly pliant in the hands of Julian and Sophie, so he was made their assistant, and employed to draw water, pick vegetables, sweep the yard, wash and comb the dog, and so on. In short he did everything other people found tiresome, seeming positively to enjoy it, and varying his work by occasional graceful somersaults, or by telling foolish stories, all of which began,

“When I was a clown. . .”

He was happy enough, for he wanted nothing but a bed, food, and a little kindness, all of which he received at the White House, in addition to such instruction as he was capable of receiving to teach him how to serve that just Master who only requires from man an account of that which has been committed to him.

No one was forgotten, but of course it took time to find out how everybody was situated, and how most usefully to testify gratitude. At last the day of departure arrived, and, in accordance with every one's wishes, the party made for the Rhine, intending to stop and rest at the White House, where Adalbert had been so hospitably received. It was arranged that the servants who were to accompany the family should start a couple of days later, and Rosette was told that she could stay behind if she was afraid of taking a long journey at the beginning of winter; but to that she turned a deaf ear, and although she had fixed the very time of Adalbert's restoration for her own return home, she now found she could not leave her little darling. They let her have her own way, and her packing was soon done, her luggage consisting of one small trunk and an old bonnet box containing three caps.

"Don't forget my present, whatever you do!" cried Adalbert, dancing about before her.

"No fear of that! I value it as I do my eyes, that's why I have hung it round my neck!"

"Round your neck! Show it to me."

And she showed him a little box hung on a ribbon which was round her neck, and this box contained the button and the bit of ink-stained collar which Adalbert had brought with him from his exile. The child flung his arms round his old nurse's neck, and gave her a hearty kiss.

They started in the best spirits, a party of five, for Tilly went with her kind friends to see what a milder climate would do for her. After travelling some hours they stopped for dinner, and, as often happened, lingered too long over the meal, the train was nearly off, and in the hurry and confusion M. de Valneige could not find his own carriage again, so he said to Adalbert, "Let's get in anywhere we can, we will join your mother again at the next station."

Adalbert in his hurry jumped into a third class carriage by mistake; the porters were shouting "To your carriages! To your carriages!" the doors were being shut, and M. de Valneige, springing after his son, said, "We have chosen a very bad one, but it's only for a quarter of an hour."

At the end of the carriage there were several passengers who seemed tired, and one of them was asleep. His great height, his huge limbs, and marked features attracted a good deal of attention. Adalbert looked at him. . . . M. de Valneige saw his boy turn pale.

“What’s the matter?” he inquired anxiously.

“Nothing, papa.”

“Are you ill?”

“No, papa.”

M. de Valneige became anxious, and put a few hurried, whispered questions to his boy, who at last, quite frozen with terror, got out the words, “It is the man!”

M. de Valneige shuddered with horror. The cruel tyrant who had caused his boy so much suffering was within his reach. Chance had delivered him up to the just vengeance of a father who had it in his power to have him taken up, tried, and convicted. He had plenty of proofs: the button, the spot of ink, the ribbon, the words written in the cellar, the depositions of M. Baptist and of the applewoman, Julian, Sophie, Blondine, all rose before his mind, everything urged him to hunt the man down; but in his pocket-book he had a letter from poor Gella, who had trusted in his word. Her scheme had not been carried out, it was true, but she had given information in exchange for a promise. M. de Valneige looked at the man, and trembling beneath the weight of his sacred promise, which bound him for ever, he said to Adalbert,

“Oh, my boy, remember that a word of honour is an oath that must never be broken on any pretext or under any circumstances!”

As he spoke M. de Valneige, not yet very strong, closed his eyes. It was his turn now to become pale, even his lips turned white, and Adalbert gave a cry of fright. The faint did not however last more than a minute, some of the passengers opened the windows to give the poor invalid

air, and everybody looked at the father and son with compassionate interest. M. de Valneige conquered his emotion, and at the next station he and Adalbert got out. The man with the iron hand got out too, and did not re-enter the train.

The painful subject was earnestly discussed in the carriage containing the rest of the family, and at last they arrived at the White House.

There everything had literally been turned upside down in honour of their visit. Beds were somehow provided for all, piles of plates of all sizes, and a roaring fire in the kitchen, for Sophie had surpassed herself.

The new friends made acquaintance with each other with many professions of interest and good-will. Adalbert threw himself into Madame Deschamps' arms, who kissed him as if he had been one of her own grandchildren. The whole party talked, walked about, and expressed their happiness in a thousand different ways.

Dinner-time came, and everybody ate for two. After dinner Adalbert and Tilly played with Natchès, who, instead of resenting his inferior position, said to them with an air of perfect contentment,

"When I was a clown I did not think myself unhappy, but now I see that I was very miserable. The only thing I regret is that I can't play tricks at fairs any more. I used to think that great fun when I was a clown."

They went to bed. Mattresses here, there, and everywhere. Madame Deschamps had managed to arrange everything somehow, and although it was a close pack, rather like an encampment of the Israelites, everybody

was quite content. All slept beautifully and awoke refreshed.

The next morning Madame de Valneige went to see Gella at the hospital, taking Adalbert with her. They found the poor girl about to receive her first communion. The lady had the pleasure of receiving it with her whilst Adalbert knelt close by, and Gella, enlightened and purified at last, knew the good God of whom Adalbert had told her—that God of whom it is written that He loves the work of His hands.

The invalid was nearly well enough to travel and to go and join her father. Adalbert told her of the scene in the railway carriage. Gella's great eyes lit up as she met the sweet expression in those of her little friend, and she answered very softly,

“Little one, tell your father I believe in honour now, and to try and reward him I will pray for you every day. I have nothing to give you but my prayers, but those are yours.”

When she saw that Madame de Valneige was listening she felt ashamed of speaking so familiarly to Adalbert, and added,

“Forgive me, Master Adalbert, for addressing you so; it is the last time. We shall never meet again on earth!”

And Gella burst into tears. But Madame de Valneige said to her:

“Don't cry, dear Gella, something tells me that we shall meet again: be honest, be a good Christian, and God will be with you. As your infirmity will prevent your leading a wandering life in future, I will help you to work either as a needlewoman or to open a little shop. Accept this

money, which will pay for your journey, and leave you something to begin business and support yourself until your profits come in."

As she spoke she handed Gella a note for five hundred francs, at which the invalid gazed as if she could not believe her eyes.

"Madame," she said, "you overwhelm me! . . . but I cannot accept this money. It is true that it would be the means of saving me, for I could easily earn my living at Lyons near my aunt, and perhaps my father, seeing me established in a little trade, would give up his present mode of life, of which he is already tired; but what can I say to him when he asks me where I got the five hundred francs? He must never suspect the truth."

"You can tell him that a lady who saw you at the took an interest in you on account of your misfortunes, and that she wished to help you in your arduous life."

"But suppose he wants to know your name?"

"You will tell him that they call me a Sister of Charity."

"Oh, yes! and you are indeed Charity itself. I don't believe there can be any one in the world kinder than you are. From my childhood I saw nothing but evil, but now you have taught me to believe in charity."

And Gella kissed the hands of her protectress, and gazed in her face with eyes full of gratitude.

Suddenly Madame de Valneige, impelled by a feeling of intense pity and gratitude, exclaimed,

"Gella, I thank you for not having added to my boy's suffering, and for your wish to give him back to me. I

must give you something else to remember us by, and you must keep what I give you all your life."

She then cut off one of Adalbert's beautiful fair curls, and gave it to the poor girl to be kept for ever.

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Gella humbly, "I am not worthy of it, but thank you, thank you!"

And now the clock had struck, the time for Madame de Valneige and Adalbert to leave had come; and as they turned away the poor girl leaned back upon her pillow exhausted by all she had gone through, and listened till their retreating footsteps died away.

Madame de Valneige, this pious duty performed, returned to the White House, and her husband was much pleased when he heard of all that she had said and done.

The same day a visit was paid to the good people who had taken so active a part in Adalbert's rescue.

They found little Blondine, whose childish audacity had been the immediate cause of everybody's happiness, at home with her grandmother. The happy mother kissed her, and during her visit, M. de Valneige having prepared everything beforehand, the old grandmother, whose only heir was Blondine, became proprietor of the house in which she had hitherto been only a tenant. The effect of this change on the people around was immense: the greatest respect was henceforth paid to the new owner of the property, and big Lucas made up his mind to ask the little one to dance at the next country fête, although she was still looked upon as a mere child.

The quiet Baptist, who had been slightly roused by all this excitement, was introduced to the people of Valneige,

and it was arranged that he should supply the household, farm, and village with cheese and herrings all the year round. Moreover he received a present of an admirable elixir for soothing the toothache, to which, poor man, he was still subject.

As for Madame Tourtebonne, it was no use hoping to find her at home, so she was invited to the White House, and Adalbert's happy parents, by securing to her a little competency for her old age, relieved her of the necessity of pushing along her truck any more. Her gratitude was expressed in glowing words, mingled with the most bitter and lively self-reproaches for having said to the driver, "Let us be off! Let us be off!" when a pale and trembling peasant woman exclaimed, "Is it you?" For, as the reader will have guessed, that woman was Madame de Valneige secretly seeking for her son, and mingling unnoticed in the densest crowds protected by her disguise.

"It was I who delayed your happiness, madam," said poor Madame Tourtebonne; "I am so sorry."

But a moment afterwards, remembering her little annuity, she said to Sophie with a radiant face,

"I hope I shall be able to enjoy myself, and find something to pass the time, now I have nothing to do."

Poor woman! she did try to enjoy herself; but habit had become a second nature, and she soon found that the greatest pleasure of her life had been pushing along her truck. Accustomed to an active life, the weariness of having nothing to do soon became insupportable to her, and, like a sensible woman, she resumed her traffic; but now she was able to stay at home on rainy, snowy, or windy days,

and instead of giving away half-rotten apples, she gave away good ones: that was her mode of enjoying herself.

And so Adalbert's rescue brought happiness to everybody. Before leaving the White House presents were given to all the servants. It was rather difficult to know what to choose for Natchès, who cared for nothing but eating, but he got a large bag of sweets.

The Valneige family travelled for several months, passed the winter in the south, and returned to Valneige in the spring, where they prepared soon to receive their good friends, for they were determined to renew the remembrance of all that had passed by a few weeks spent together every year. How often the two mothers talked over all the troubles dear little Adalbert had gone through, and how often, as Madame Deschamps had foreseen, did Madame de Valneige take up and look at the yellow ribbon which was a relic of those terrible days!

Adalbert grew up very obedient, and now that he is become a man he still obeys. He obeys the commandments of God, the laws of his country, the counsel and wishes of his parents. He will be the father of a family one of these days, and will say to his children as was once said to him: "Children, be obedient."

And to all of you, young readers, we repeat that advice. It is good, useful, necessary to be obedient. May you learn to be so at home surrounded by your friends, and not, like Adalbert, in exile and misfortune.

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